



Wainberg, Romina (2016) Obeying and resisting gendered normativities in contemporary Argentine fiction. MPhil(R) thesis.

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Obeying and Resisting Gendered Normativities in Contemporary Argentine Fiction.

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the
Degree of Master of Philosophy
in Hispanic Studies.

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August 2016

Abstract

This thesis examines the extent to which five contemporary Argentine fictions resist and/or obey normative constructions of gendered identities. Over the last fifteen years, political recognition and social acceptance of LGBTI rights have increased at an unprecedented rate in Argentinean society. Due to the passing of liberal laws and to a cultural openness to new forms of sex/gendered identities, a society that used to ignore and/or neglect the LGBTI community's core demands seems to have been replaced by one that takes them into particular consideration. In this frame, the complexity of the transition between the highly restrictive models of social behaviour encouraged under the last dictatorship (1976-83) and the present scenario of increasing broad-mindedness is a subject that needs further investigation. Moreover, the literary representations of the changes experienced during the last decades in Argentina remain mostly unexplored, as contemporary critics focus their analyses on 20th century authors.

In this context, the present thesis will trace a genealogy of gendered identities in Argentine fiction across the period of consolidation (post-dictatorship, in 1983) through a moment of crisis (1998-2001) and into the new millennium. By doing so, this analysis will seek to grasp the ways in which literary works are related to the political, economic and social scenarios across this particular time period; paying special attention to the relationship between the changes experienced during the last fifteen years and how they are represented within contemporary literature. To carry out the task, this study will analyse texts that have been written at key moments since the fall of the last dictatorship and that have approached the subject of gendered norms by establishing a specific dialogue with the models characteristic of their time. Taking these requirements into consideration, the texts that have been selected are 'La larga risa de todos esos años' (1983) by Rodolfo Fogwill, *Señorita* (1999) by Hebe Uhart, Mariano Blatt's *Increíble* (2007), Hernan Vanoli's *Las mellizas del bardo* (2012) and Mauro Moschini's 'Tarde de amigas' (2013). By looking at the ways in which these works interact with the period of their publication and setting, this thesis will explore the relationship that they establish with normative constructions of gendered identities and with the dichotomous structure on which those identities rely.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Declaration	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	- 1 -
Chapter 2: La larga risa de todos esos años	- 11 -
Chapter 3: Señorita.....	- 22 -
Chapter 4: Increíble	- 35 -
Chapter 5: Las mellizas del bardo.....	- 48 -
Chapter 6: Tarde de amigas.....	- 65 -
Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	- 78 -
Bibliography	- 87 -

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Eamon McCarthy for his unbelievable patience, invaluable guidance and unshakable confidence in my work.

Special thanks go to Diana, Sergio and Melisa Wainberg for their support, without which this project would have been unthinkable. My gratitude also goes to Sabe Lewellyn for his companionship and his kindness.

Finally, I would like to thank Ivana Feldfeber, Tomás Stöck and Guido Rosenberg for being there for me in every moment of doubt, uncertainty and weakness.

Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Chapter 1: Introduction.

Over the last fifteen years, political recognition and social acceptance of LGBTBI rights have increased at an unprecedented rate in Argentinean society. Due to the passing of liberal laws and to a cultural openness to new forms of sex/gendered identities, a society that used to ignore and/or neglect the LGBTBI community's core demands seems to have been replaced by one that takes them into particular consideration.¹ In this context, the complexity of the transition between the highly restrictive models of social behaviour encouraged under the last dictatorship (1976-83) and the present scenario of increasing broad-mindedness is a subject that needs further investigation. Moreover, the literary representations of the changes experienced during the last decades in Argentina remain mostly unexplored, as contemporary critics focus their analyses on 20th century authors. This is also the case of studies that have explicitly approached contemporary Argentinean literature, such as Verónica Garibotto's *Crisis y reemergencia: El siglo XIX en la ficción contemporánea de Argentina, Chile y Uruguay 1990-2001* (2015) and Elsa Drucaroff's *Los prisioneros de la torre. Política, relatos y jóvenes en la postdictadura* (2007). As they have interpreted new fiction as 'un resumen del pasado' (Ducaroff, 2011: 34), they have focused their analysis on the way in which recently published books have been influenced by the works of 20th century canonic authors such as 'Arlt, Borges, Cortázar, Piglia y Saer' (Royo, 2011: 1). As opposed to this backward-looking tendency within literary studies, sociological approaches on the Argentinean editorial scene -such as Daniela Szpilbarg's *El espacio editorial «independiente»: Hacia una tipología de las editoriales en el período 1998-2010* (2012)- and methodological approaches such as the one deployed by Josefina Ludmer in *Aquí, América Latina* (2010); constitute serious efforts to develop 'un nuevo método crítico' (Valencia, 2010).

¹ Although Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's government had a relevant role in the materialization of these achievements, they cannot be reduced to nor understood as an isolated initiative coming from political personalities; but rather they were achieved as a consequence of decades of struggle on the part of LGBTBI communities.

In this context, the present thesis will trace a genealogy of gendered identities in Argentine fiction across the period of consolidation (post-dictatorship, in 1983) through a moment of crisis (1998-2001) and into the new millennium. By doing so, this analysis will seek to grasp the ways in which literary works are related to the political, economic and social scenarios across this particular time period; paying special attention to the relationship between the changes experienced during the last fifteen years and how they are represented within contemporary literature. To carry out the task, this study will analyze texts that have been written at key moments since the fall of the last dictatorship and that have approached the subject of gendered norms by establishing a specific dialogue with the models characteristic of their time. Taking these requirements into consideration, the texts that have been selected are 'La larga risa de todos esos años' (1983) by Rodolfo Fogwill, *Señorita* (1999) by Hebe Uhart, Mariano Blatt's *Increíble* (2007), Hernan Vanoli's *Las mellizas del bardo* (2012) and Mauro Moschini's 'Tarde de amigas' (2013).² By looking at the ways in which these works interact with the period of their publication and setting, this thesis will explore the relationship that they establish with normative constructions of gendered identities.

Whilst the Peronist period (1945-1955) falls outside the direct scope of the thesis, it is the setting for Uhart's novella and is a time period in which women's roles were radically rethought in Argentina. During these years, the country went through reforms that can be mapped almost directly onto the first two presidencies of Juan Domingo Perón. This was a time remembered as a political and economic turning point as Perón ushered in many changes for the working class and specifically for women, who experienced increasing visibility

² Even though there are arguably plenty of texts which have approached the subject of gendered norms whilst establishing a dialogue with the models characteristic of their time, the choice of the stories to be analyzed in this dissertation was based not only on the previous criteria, but also on the way in which the chosen texts are (or can be) related to each other. In this context, and as it will be explained below, the choice of Moschini's text can be explained by the fact that this story represents another critical iteration of Fogwill's story; correlatively, the choice of Fogwill's story can be explained by its capacity to strategically employ stereotypes of masculinity and femininity which, though pertinent to the post-dictatorship period, are still contemporary. At the same time, the contemporariness of these stereotypes, as well as contemporary critical (or uncritical) approaches towards them, can be specifically grasped by looking at Uhart's nouvelle, Blatt's text and Vanoli's story. Finally, these three texts specifically relate to one another as they focus their attention in the appropriation, questioning and/or reformulation of the meaning of specific linguistic terms which have been historically associated with stereotypical sex/gendered identities.

in the workplace and gained the right to vote.³ However, the political and economic collapse which took place during the last Peronist government was followed by a military coup in 1976; which led to the country's last and harshest dictatorship that began in 1976 and ended in 1983.

In this timeframe, the years 1983 and 1984 represent a period in which Argentina's political systems experienced a transition from dictatorship to democracy marked by the first democratic elections in 1983. Although this first election is recalled and represents a milestone in Argentina's political scene, military forces still exercised a significant amount of control over the country's political and economic decisions. As Marcelo Tabbaj points out, Alfonsín's presidency was '[un] gobierno de transición en que ... la herencia recibida por parte de los militares complicó la consolidación de la Democracia' (Tabbaj, 2014). Within this transitory context, the relative political stability was accompanied by a wider (though moderate) sense of cultural freedom, which allowed the explicit thematization of homosexuality and gendered identities that were condemned during the dictatorship era.⁴

From this period of transition to the years prior to the new millennium, significant changes occurred in the political, economic, social and cultural fields. In regard to the first two areas, the years 1999 and 2000 represent a period tied to a political collapse and a severe recession which led to an unprecedented crisis in 2001. As politics was largely concerned with the maintenance of the democratic system and the results of the economic model implemented during the 1990s, gender rights were officially left in the background.⁵ Nevertheless,

³ Even though the accomplishments of the period are noticeable in relation to gendered normativities, it is worth mentioning that, as Marta Zabaleta points out, 'las mujeres habían obtenido el voto' (Zabaleta, 2012: 18) but they were generally far from 'la emancipación de ... tener un trabajo fuera de la casa y ... bien pagado, de manera de garantizarse la independencia de toda forma de tiranía familiar' (Zabaleta, 2012: 18). As the theorist mentions, 'eso en sí mismo sólo era pensable ... para aquellas mujeres suficientemente privilegiadas por su extracción de clase como para tener una muy buena educación formal' (Zabaleta, 2012: 19).

⁴ As Jordi Díez explains, 'the 1976 military coup ... declared homosexuality to be one of the many types of subversion to be fought' (Díez, 2011: 15). Thus, 'the harassment, imprisonment, torture and murder of homosexuals became government policy during this darkest period of Argentine history' (Díez, 2011: 15).

⁵ As official records of the Comunidad Homosexual Argentina (CHA) point out, 'el primer precedente legal ... en la conquista de los derechos de la comunidad LGTBI' (CHA, 2013) was the inclusion in 1996 of the Article 11 in 'la Constitución de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires ... en contra de la discriminación por Orientación Sexual' (CHA, 2013). However, this legal modification of the constitution during the late 1990s was not a spontaneous political initiative but a result of the LGTBI

this lack of attention on the part of politics was met with a new sense of broad-mindedness within the social and the cultural fields. As Joanna Page points out, the cultural manifestations of the time represented ‘a response to shifting social realities’ (Page, 2009: 63) and the innovative artistic approach towards ‘the collapse of the nation-state [was] paradoxically also part of its reconstruction’ (Page, 2009: 199).⁶ This innovative approach coincided with the reassessment of normative identities and acceptance of new kinds of social interactions. Within this epochal context, in which cultural freedom was allowed though not politically addressed, homosexuality became relatively more visible.⁷

As opposed to the prior economic and political crisis, the years 2005 to 2007 -which coincided with Néstor Kirchner’s presidency- were marked by a period of ‘crecimiento económico rápido y sostenido ... después de la marcada recesión que había comenzado a mediados de 1998’ (Sandoval, Weisbrot, 2007: 6). This context of stability and growth following the economic collapse of 2001 was accompanied by a series of progressive political measures. These measures, which involved the ‘la re-estatización de varias empresas de servicios públicos’ (López, Zeller, 2013: 10) and ‘el avance de las causas judiciales por los delitos cometidos durante la dictadura’ (Palmisciano, Romanin, 2016: 3), also included the legalization of same-sex civil union and the first public debates about the legalization of same-sex marriage.⁸ The early 2000s were a time of political progressiveness in terms of human rights and economic recovery; and this

community’s ‘campaña por los derechos humanos de las personas LGTBI’ (CHA, 2013). In this sense, the legal accomplishments made during the decade were not a result of political willingness but a consequence of years of struggling coming from LGTBI independent organizations.

⁶ Although Joanna Page focuses her work on contemporary Argentinean cinema, her analysis is also precise in terms of its evaluation of the wider cultural context in which contemporary cinema is inscribed.

⁷ According to Ange La Furcia, ‘solo hasta la revisión de 1987 del DSM-III [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-III], la «homosexualidad egodistónica» ... referida al malestar que sentían personas frente a su orientación sexual, fue eliminada como una categoría diagnóstica. Asimismo, la despatologización sería avalada públicamente en 1990 por la Organización Mundial de la Salud’ (La Furcia, 2013: 144); which evidences that during that period homosexual bonds were increasingly but slowly accepted worldwide. Within a national context, and as it has been mentioned above, ‘[recién en] 1996, después de años de lucha’ (CHA, 2013) the constitution of la Ciudad de Buenos Aires incorporated to its content: ‘todas las personas tienen idéntica dignidad y son iguales ante la ley ... no admitiéndose ... la segregación por razones o con pretexto de raza, etnia, género, orientación sexual, edad, religión, ideología, opinión, nacionalidad, caracteres físicos, condición psicofísica, social, económica o cualquier circunstancia que implique distinción, exclusión, restricción o menoscabo’ (CHA, 2013).

⁸ Between the years 2005 and 2007, same-sex civil union was officially legal in Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (2002), the Province of Río Negro (2003) and the city of Villa Carlos Paz (2007). At the same time, prior to the presidency of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in 2009 and to the law that legalized same-sex marriage in 2010, the first statements in favor of starting a same-sex marriage debate in congress were being issued along with an increasing number of academic publications favouring ‘el argumento igualitario’ (Gargarella, 2007: 655) or ‘argumento por la igualdad’ (Gargarella, 2007: 655).

coincided with a progressive posture in relation to gendered norms. Correlatively, and as Ana Wortman highlights, the cultural scene became increasingly prolific and ‘nuevas formas de producción de la cultura’ (Wortman, 2005: 1) were incorporated in order to reverse ‘los efectos que el modelo neoliberal había tenido en el tejido social’ (Wortman, 2005: 1).

During the years that followed Nestor Kirchner’s presidency, the relation between the political, the economic, the social and the cultural spheres became more controversial. For a start, the period between 2008 and 2013 was marked by a political and economic crisis which started with ‘el año con el primer déficit fiscal desde 1996’ (Canosa, 2013) and ended up with several major disputes; including the ones concerning ‘la reforma judicial’ (Binder, 2008: 48), the polemic versions of the country’s inflationary indexes and the incorporation of supposedly polemic figures into the political scene; such as the fledgling economist Axel Kiciloff. In this context, both the political and the social spheres were affected by a pronounced confrontation between ‘el kirchnerismo’ (Della Rocca, 2013: 101) and ‘la oposición’ (Della Rocca, 2013: 84). However, this harsh political, financial and social setting was the backdrop for major cultural accomplishments in regard to gendered normativities. These accomplishments undoubtedly led to the ascent to power of women presidents in Argentina, Brazil and Chile, thus disrupting the traditional patriarchal structures of government in Brazil and the Southern Cone. At the same time, and as LGBTQI rights were being debated worldwide, Argentina became the first Latin American country to allow gay marriage in 2010.⁹ In this context, the economic and financial situation was out of synch with the culturally progressive measures and openness that marked the period.

Just as the political and economic settings were not always in tune with the transformations that occurred within other fields, the fiction produced during each period was not directly related to the political, social, cultural and/or editorial scenarios of its time. Nevertheless, there is an essential difference between the way in which the cultural sphere has been historically

⁹ As Paula Biglieri highlights, ‘en la madrugada del 15 de julio de 2010 el Senado de la Nación de la República Argentina aprobó, por 33 votos a favor y 27 en contra, la ley conocida popularmente como «matrimonio igualitario»... la aprobación convirtió a la Argentina en el primer país de América Latina, y el décimo en el mundo, en reconocer iguales derechos a todas las parejas y familias’ (Biglieri, 2012: 145).

related to the political or economic spheres; and the way in which literary works have established links with all the aforementioned spheres. Even though there has been a non-linear relationship between the cultural, the political and the economic scenarios, the cultural path towards broad-mindedness about sexed and gendered identities was linear in the sense that its accomplishments have not been revoked as they have been gradually and progressively gained since 1983. As opposed to this progress, literary expressions of gendered identities represent a case of a nonlinear trajectory, within which there have been plenty of conservative works published at a time of pronounced cultural openness, just as there have been works that were very forward-thinking for the period in which they were published.¹⁰ In this context, the historical overview presented above becomes specifically relevant, as it not only emphasises the non-direct relationship between the literary and/or cultural sphere and social, economic, political and cultural worlds, but it also underlines the contrast between the non-linear trajectory of the literary scene and the progressive trajectory of the cultural one.

Similarly to the progressive trajectory of the cultural sphere, the editorial scene has been gradually but consistently growing since the fall of the last dictatorship. In this sense, the wider though still relatively limited opportunities for publication that marked the years 1983-1984 were followed by an increasingly inclusive editorial environment which afforded opportunities for the publication of historically unheard voices. From the year 2001 and, especially during the period of stability that followed the economic crisis, '[surgieron] numerosas editoriales pequeñas, nacionales, muchas veces con producción cooperativa, que comenzaron a renovar el panorama de las publicaciones' (Szpilbarg, 2010: 2). This panorama not only allowed for the inclusion of an increasing number of innovative voices in 'la escena editorial' (Szpilbarg, 2010: 2), but it also encouraged the incorporation of new perspectives into the literary scene. This broader literary scenario not only introduced the works of very young

¹⁰ This does not mean that literary works have been produced without considering or being influenced by their historical contexts; in fact, the increasing mind-broadness of the last decades have opened up new ways of approaching gendered identities that were unthinkable forty years ago. However, the fact that a new spectrum of possibilities is now available does not guarantee that it is going to be critically employed or taken into account by contemporary writers.

authors such as Mariano Blatt, but it also incorporated previously marginalized writers such as Walter Lezcano.¹¹

In spite of the social and political turmoil which characterized the years 2009 to 2013, the independent editorial field continued to progress towards a period of 'auge' (Sciancalepore, 2010) by creating new modalities of circulation and publication; such as the 'Feria del Libro Independiente y Autogestiva' (Vanoli, 2010: 136) and the 'club virtual de libros de editoriales independientes' (Blanc, 2013). In this context, the inclusive editorial scenario opened its doors to both progressive and conservative works by previously unpublished authors. As the following analysis will show, not only were conservative texts such as Vanoli's published within the frame of an inclusive editorial setting; but they were frequently misread as breakthrough works because of their avant-garde style. This was the case of books such as Enzo Maqueira's *Electrónica* (2014) and Juan Terranova's *El pornógrafo* (2005). As opposed to these conservative though widely read texts, eye-opening works such as Martín Dubini's *Alrededor de Shannon* (2015) and Ioshua's *Malincho* (2011) were mostly overlooked by literary critics.¹²

This thesis will study the relation between sex/gendered identities brought up by each of the chosen texts and will explore the stereotypical masculine and/or feminine features attributed to their fictional characters. In order to do so, this dissertation will employ as its main methodological frame Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (2001) along with *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. In regard to Sedgwick's work, the present thesis will take into special consideration the sections 'Homosocial Desire', 'Sexual Politics and Sexual meaning' and 'Sex or History?'.

¹¹ It is worth underlining that, when Mariano Blatt's *Incredible* was published in 2007, the author was only twenty-four years old. Walter Lezcano was a high-school teacher from Corrientes and is now editor of the independent publisher Mancha de Aceite.

¹² With regards to Ioshua, his works have been historically praised in terms of their quality by specific and specifically small publishers such as Nulú Bonsai. In fact, the only moment in which the poet received attention by the media was when he died as a consequence of 'las huellas de la violencia familiar' (Alcaraz, 2015) and the fact that he was a HIV carrier. In this context, widely read websites such as La Nación Blog and Vorterix published sensationalistic articles concentrating on Ioshua's controversial personality as 'un poeta gay del conurbano' (Soto, 2015) rather than on the content of his versatile literary work. In the case of Dubini's book, only a few analyses and reviews were published and those that were are all found on independent websites by little known literary critics.

In these sections, the theorist explores the boundaries that have been historically placed between different same-sex bonds and the way in which these boundaries have contributed to keep sex/gendered identities within a rigid dual structure. In order to displace this structure, Sedgwick builds and characterizes an alternative system in which identities can be rethought. This system, instead of locating sex/gendered identities in one of two opposite poles, relocates them in a labile spectrum which dismantles the presupposition according to which one has no option but to be either homosexual or heterosexual (just as one cannot supposedly adopt a gendered identity outside the man/woman dichotomy). In relation to Butler's study, the present thesis will focus on the chapters 'Theorizing the Binary, the Unitary and Beyond' and 'Language, Power and Strategies' included in *Gender Trouble* (1990); along with the expansion and the reformulation of their theoretical standpoints as deployed in the section 'Gender is Burning. Questions of Appropriation and Subversion' in *Bodies that Matter* (1993). Within these chapters, Butler analyzes the historico-political foundations of the matrix that originates and preserves sex/gendered identities within a binary system.¹³ In this context, Butler also studies the role that linguistic terms associated with sex/gendered identities have played in the reification of that dual system within which identities are meant to be assumed. Finally, she analyzes the discursive structure of linguistic expressions in terms of its potential to historically modify the meanings attached to these expressions.

In this sense, Butler's theory will specifically inform my approach to the relationship between the historically prevalent meaning of linguistic expressions tied to sex/gendered identities and the constitutive possibility of changing this meaning over time. Taking the prior possibility into account, this study will analyze the extent to which contemporary literature has tried to release these expressions from their heteronormative meaning, which supposes a predetermined association between certain words and gendered standards that are dual, idealized and unattainable. In this sense, the present analysis will pay special attention to the appropriation, questioning and/or reformulation of the

¹³ From Butler's perspective, the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1990: 6) requires and institutes 'the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between «feminine» and «masculine» where these are understood as expressive attributes of «male» and «female»' (Butler, 1990: 24).

meaning of specific linguistic terms predominately linked with the stereotypes of femininity and masculinity.

At the same time, this study will include each story's perspective on these stereotypes as related to the binary structure on which they rely. In this regard, Sedgwick's theory will be particularly fruitful, as it considers gendered identities outside this dichotomous system and places them within a continuum. As has been suggested above, to place identities within a continuum means that it is impossible to draw a clear and steady line between homosocial and homosexual bonds.¹⁴ The impossibility of drawing a steady line will not only allow this analysis to reposition sex/gendered identities within a rather fluid system, but it will also help to consider the possibility of fluctuations in the sex/gendered identities of the fictional characters. Moreover, the openness of the texts in relation to the fluidity of their characters' identities will contribute to a discussion of the stories' critical (or uncritical) posture in relation to the sex/gendered normativities that dominate the period in which they are written or set.

In short, this dissertation will look at how these historical and theoretical perspectives have been expressed within the chosen literary works. In the case of Fogwill's story, this analysis will explore long-lasting prejudices related to the historically correlative dichotomies man/woman and masculinity/femininity. By studying Uhart's *Señorita*, I will look at the relationship between the usage of the very term 'señorita' and the unattainable gendered standards historically attached to it. Similarly, I will analyze *Increíble* by Mariano Blatt in terms of the way in which the text critically incorporates the term 'pibe', taking into account the relation between the rigid standards attached to the characters as 'pibes' and their ambivalent sex/gendered identities. In regard to Vanoli's *Las mellizas del bardo*, this thesis will approach the bond between the dichotomies 'femininity/masculinity' and 'female/male' by analyzing a futuristic scenario in which social roles of men and women have been allegedly inverted. In addition, I

¹⁴ According to Sedgwick, the term 'homosocial' has been historically used to refer to 'bonds between persons of the same sex' (Sedgwick, 1985: 696). However, this usage suggests that there is a clear line that keeps homosexual relationships apart from homosocial ones. As Sedgwick argues and as this thesis will show by following her theory, the line that supposedly separates one type of relationship from the other is always flexible and blurry.

will trace the extent to which Vanoli's work modifies the historical meaning of the term 'mina'. When analyzing Moschini's 'Tarde de amigas', I will explore the text's re-appropriation of the term 'minita' and the way in which the standards of femininity attached to it can be both exhibited and/or subverted. Finally, I will turn my attention to the implicit intertextual use of Fogwill's story in Moschini's work in order to assess the degree to which the constraints regarding sex/gendered identities found in 'La larga risa de todos estos años' have shifted in its contemporary iteration.

Chapter 2: La larga risa de todos esos años

The short story 'La larga risa de todos estos años' is set between the years 1975-1983 -a period that coincides exactly with the last Argentinean dictatorship (1976-83)- and was published in 1983; a year which, even though the country remained in a period of transition, still marks the date of the return of democracy. Whether or not this year appears as one of those 'cortes temporales a partir de los cuales es posible escribir la historia' (Marimón, Aizenberg, 2012: 5), it is surely one of those milestones from which both historical testimonies and literary pieces can (re)start building wider modalities of publication.¹⁵ The relatively greater sense of freedom to publish at that time allows Fogwill to thematize homosexuality explicitly in his story by focusing not only on a lesbian couple, but on the sexuality of the lesbian couple as essential to the deployment of the story. Even though the sexuality of the couple is crucial for the construction and understanding of the plot, it is also the one fact that remains hidden for most of the text. In order to keep this fact hidden from the reader, the text persistently occludes the fact that the narrator is a woman. Moreover, a series of clues are gradually revealed that lead the reader to presume that the narrator is a man; which can be grasped by examining a set of features attached to the narrator throughout the story, along with a set of presumptions and prejudices attributed to the reader.

To begin with, the author of the text is publicly recognized as a heterosexual man. According to narratologist Mieke Bal: 'despite critical prohibitions against equating narrative characters with their historical creators, readers nonetheless often presume affinities of identity, perspective and

¹⁵ It is still meaningful to emphasise that, although the date of publication of 'La larga risa de todos estos años' is the year of the return of democracy, it is also part of a period of 'transición democrática' (Wortman, 2002: 328) in which military forces still carried a significant amount of power and influence over the democratic governments. So, although the conditions of publication were relatively safe during 1983, they were far from optimal. In this sense, it was a period where publishers were still suffering the effects of 'el peso persecutorio de los militares sobre la cultura' (Wortman, 2002: 330). From the political perspective, the threat that the military forces represented even after the democratic elections led President Alfonsín to 'sancionar judicialmente solo a algunos de los responsables ... sin enemistarse con las Fuerzas Armadas en su conjunto' (Acuña, Szmulovitz, 1993: 37).

experience between the author and the fictional voice' (Bal, 2004: 132). Furthermore, 'in the case of sex, these affinities are also routinely assumed by those who 'know better'' (Bal, 2004: 132).¹⁶ If both naïve and critical readers normally approach a text with the default assumption according to which there is a coincidence between the sex/gendered identity of the narrator and the sex/gendered identity of the author (unless/until it is suggested otherwise), Fogwill's reader is already predisposed to identify the narrator of 'La larga risa de todos esos años' as a heterosexual male. In the particular case of 'La larga risa de todos esos años', the assumption according to which the narrator is a man is not only encouraged by the a priori identification between the author's and the narrator's sexuality underlined by Bal; but also by the fact that Fogwill's stories are known to display 'el delirio metafísico de narradores masculinos' (Gurian, 2007). In this sense, it is only by paying attention to the subtle clues delivered by the text that the reader might realize that s/he is dealing with an exceptional or non-default scenario. In other words, to presuppose that the author, and thus, the narrator, is either a man or a woman, the reader must also assume that those are the only identities available; thus, relying on a 'cultural matrix [which] requires that certain kinds of «identities» cannot «exist» —that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not «follow» from either sex or gender' (Butler, 1990: 6). Moreover, as the text does not seem to offer any consistent proof that the narrator is not a man, the reader tends to maintain this initial presumption.

One of the ways in which the story manages to avoid giving consistent proof of the narrator's sexuality is the absence of grammatically gendered adjectives or pronouns until the penultimate page of the text. Since the grammatically 'unmarked' gender is the masculine, when the reader is faced with the ambivalence of ungendered pronouns such as the possessives 'me' and 'mis' -as employed in 'como [el subcomisario Solanas] había pensado que ella [Franca] vivía sola ... veía el desorden de papeles sobre mi escritorio, y la miraba

¹⁶ Bal's conclusion is also bolstered by Monika Fludernik studies on narratology, according to which 'the determinable sex of the empirical author ... tends to predispose readers to attributing the same sex to the narrator' (Fludernik, 2002: 268).

a ella, averiguando' (Fogwill, 1983: 2; emphases added)-, the uncritical assumption is that the pronouns refer to a man.¹⁷

The passage quoted above also sheds light on the profession of the narrator, whose job is described as mainly intellectual by references to the task of writing and the 'desorden de papeles sobre [su] escritorio' (Fogwill, 1983: 2). Through this reference to the work desk and the fact that the narrator always 'la esperaba [a su pareja]' (Fogwill, 1983: 1) writing at home, the narrator is constructed as an individual who presumably works in an intellectual field. This construction is reinforced when it is later revealed that the narrator is also a university lecturer, which can be seen in the reference: 'estaba intervenida la universidad y echaban a los profesores ... temí que me despidieran **también a mí**' (Fogwill, 1983: 6; emphasis added). As the theorist Alison Oram notes: 'masculinity is often associated with intellectual work ... [while] domestic tasks and caring work are seen as a feminine area of employment' (Oram, 1996: 14). To highlight this stereotypical schism within the field of work, the story describes the narrator's partner Franca as a woman that 'se encerraba a cocinar' (Fogwill, 1983: 3) for the narrator from the minute she got home. From a complementary perspective, the narrator's intellectual job can be also seen in opposition to Franca's job of 'hacer puntos' (Fogwill, 1983: 1), a slang term created by Fogwill to refer to prostitution. By this juxtaposition of roles, the cerebral dimension of intellectual work, which corresponds to the narrator's profession, is contrasted with the bodily dimension involved in prostitution; which is Franca's occupation and only source of income.

Another contrast is used to reinforce this stereotypical gender division when the narrator is referred to as a judo fighter who states that 'toda la gente debería practicar un deporte violento' (Fogwill, 1983: 5); while Franca practices horse-riding as a hobby. This opposition exploits the historical connection and the generalized presumption already underlined by James Messerschmidt and Raewyn Connell, according to which masculinity is often associated with sporting practice and, specifically, with the practice of 'competitive sports' (Connell, Messerschmidt, 2005: 833). As they point out, 'body-contact confrontational

¹⁷ As will be explained below, the subcomisario Solanas is a former client of Franca, the narrator's romantic partner who works as a prostitute.

sports' (Connell, Messerschmidt, 2005: 832) such as judo are frequently associated with manhood and 'commercial sports in general are a specific focus of media representations of masculinity' (Connell, Messerschmidt, 2005: 833). This generalized naturalization of the link between men and sports is also emphasised in Fogwill's story when Franca's passion for horses is described as a result of her incapacity to learn or understand judo. According to the narrator, even though Franca tried, 'jamás pudo aprender ... [ni] comprender los fundamentos de nuestro deporte' (Fogwill, 1983: 6). In this context, the fact that the 'nosotros' to which 'nuestro' refers can be easily identified with 'men' instead of being associated with a specific community of judo fighters, highlights the pre-critical bond established between men and sports (and the alleged inability of women to master that domain).

But sports are not the only domain supposedly reserved for men. Within the text, this is also the case with the consumption of alcohol. While the narrator is evoked offering or drinking whisky, Franca is seen paying for a tea or drinking 'su café en la confitería Richmond de la calle Florida' (Fogwill, 1983: 1). This contrast is specifically taking advantage of a generalized supposition pointed out by De Visser and Smith, according to whom '[it is] believed that alcohol consumption is a marker of masculinity' (De Visser, Smith, 2007: 595). At the same time, it can be seen that the specific consumption of whisky operates in an almost hyperbolic way to refer to stereotypical manly habits.

These supposedly manly and womanly habits, which include work, sport and drinking alcohol, also cover specific behaviors within the couple's intimate life. While Franca suffers from a mad jealousy that takes her from repetitively asking the narrator '¿qué hiciste hoy?, ¿quién estuvo esta tarde?' (Fogwill, 1983:3) to making stereotypical hysterical scenes because of her unreasonable insecurity and incredulity, the narrator calmly and paternalistically laughs at her behavior. To emphasise the contrast between one attitude and the other, the narrator explicitly claims: 'Celos nunca sentí; rabia sí, cuando pensé que me mentía' (Fogwill, 1983: 2). The fact that the rage of the narrator is explained to be a result of thought ('pensé') instead as one of unreason further underscores the difference between the narrator and Franca. By encouraging such a reading, the text reinforces a generalized assumption according to which 'the distinctive

masculinity [is that] of the 'man of reason' (James, 1997: 74) while women's emotions are seen as 'hysterical or insane' (James, 1997: 74). This assumption has also been explored by Kathryn Woodward, who suggests that women are frequently 'associated with nature rather than culture and with «the heart» and the emotions rather than «the head» and rationality' (Woodward, 1997: 37).¹⁸

This contrast becomes even more acute when the intimate situation gets violent and the narrator's habit of tying up her lover with a belt is mentioned. In this particular context, the narrator's description of the sexual practices of the couple - 'le vendaba [a Franca] la boca con mi cinturón, tensaba el cinturón bajo su pelo, por la nuca, y con sus cabos le ataba las manos contra la espalda' (Fogwill, 1983: 4) - seems to mirror 'the erotization of dominance and submission' (Mac Kinnon, 1989: 315). According to MacKinnon, the status of masculinity is marked by a will to show superior physical power and dominance. In the case of Fogwill's story, this stereotypical dominance is seen in the narrator's habit of physically tying up her lover, but it can be also found in specific linguistic formulations that express symbolic submission; for instance, when the narrator states: 'jamás esperé que me trajera un policía a casa' (Fogwill, 1983: 2), the pronoun 'me' emphasises a possessive relationship in which Franca is being subjugated by the narrator.

Although these misleading clues, which point to the fact that the narrator is a man, are present across the text until the penultimate page, they are interspersed with other clues that cast doubt on this initial presumption. The possibility that the narrator is a woman (rather than a man) is also constructed and remains available until the narrator's sexuality is explicitly revealed. The first such indication of this is the fact that Franca's clients are often referred to as 'ellos' (Fogwill, 1983: 1), while the reference to the 'we' or the 'I' who is opposed to 'them' remains unclear.¹⁹ For instance, the narrator's question - 'Una mujer. ¿Qué sabrían ellos que es una mujer?' (Fogwill, 1983: 1)- can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, it is possible to identify 'them' with 'men' in opposition to 'I' who is 'not a man' or 'a woman and a woman who 'sí sabe ... [sabe] que ella era una mujer' (Fogwill, 1983: 2); on the other hand, it is

¹⁸ It is worth noticing that this conclusion stems from Woodward's analysis of Hélène Cixous' works.

¹⁹ It is relevant to note that 'ellos' is a masculine pronoun that can be opposed to the feminine pronoun 'ellas' and can refer to a group of men or a group of mixed gender.

possible to identify 'ellos' with Franca's clients in particular. In this context, the reader must choose the last interpretation in order to sustain the presumption of the narrator being a man, but the possibility of the narrator not being one is also available. These two paths of interpretation are also opened up when it is said that those clients who became friends with the couple used to stay at the couple's house 'sin preocuparse por lo que hacíamos en nuestra habitación' (Fogwill, 1983: 3). Once again, two interpretations are possible: one, regarding the curiosity that the intimate life of any couple might arouse in a stranger, and the other, regarding the special curiosity that a lesbian couple might have caused at that time.

This particular curiosity that the couple awakens in other characters is exemplified when Solanas, the Deputy Commissioner who becomes friends with Franca and the narrator after being Franca's client, is brought home by Franca for the first time. The fact that Solanas examines the activity within the couple's home with unexplained inquisitiveness, as in the passage quoted previously: 'Veía el desorden de papeles sobre mi escritorio y la miraba a ella, averiguando' (Fogwill, 1983: 2), suggests that there might be something worth finding out. In the case of this extract, reading the narrator as a man is sustainable if the reader chooses to pay more attention to the mess of papers than to the fact that what awakens the curiosity of Solanas is the couple themselves. However, it is relevant to point out that this excessive attention paid to the mess leaves aside the fact that Solanas also takes into consideration Franca's role in the situation as a whole. In this sense, even when the two interpretations remain possible, the possibility that the narrator is not a man is more feasible.

A similar preference towards this interpretation occurs when the narrator mentions that what Franca used to do with her clients in bed is acted out within the private intimacy of the couple's sex life. In this particular case, an interpretation of the couple as lesbian reinforces the distance that the narrator is able to establish between the couple's bond and the bond between Franca and her clients, which allows the couple to laugh at the clients (and at all men). This might be identifiable with the type of lesbian relationship described by Stephen David Ross, according to whom 'women love each other in ways that are not

defined by men, not defined by reproduction ... in a way that only women may know' (Ross, 1995: 273). This idea of the uniqueness of the love between two women is also suggested in the story when, after the couple's separation, Franca states that with her husband 'ya no siente celos, y que ahora es él -el marido- quien siente celos' (Fogwill, 1983: 7). In this case, the use of both the male pronoun 'él' and the masculine noun husband emphasises the manhood of Franca's new partner and suggests that there might be something specific about the condition of the partner being a man that reverses the attitude of the couple towards jealousy. In this context, the jealousy of the husband can be explained by the impossibility for him to experience the same qualitative distance from Franca's clients; a distance that can only be grasped by the woman-lover who sees all clients as equally male. However, the possibility of the narrator being a woman does not completely eliminate the possibility of the 'acting out' being carried out within a heterosexual couple. As this possibility is still open, the interpretation of the narrator being a man remains available.

Another area of ambivalence is identifiable when it is mentioned that the narrator finds it difficult to meet someone to practice judo with. According to the story, this difficulty is based on the fact that the narrator is more experienced than women but weighs 'sesenta y dos kilos' (Fogwill, 1983: 5); which is a low weight for average men. In the case of this particular fact, even when sixty two kilos could be identified as an intermediate weight, it is only by making a great (although unnoticed) effort that the reader might be able to dismiss the strangeness of this in between status of the narrator in the context of judo fighting. However, a reader approaching the story with the presumption already underlined by Fludernik and Bal -according to which the default sexuality of the author is inherited by his narrators-, could reason differently. Furthermore, as Fogwill is actually known for being a judo fighter, this self-referential mark can be understood as another indication that the narrator is a man.

The same employment of self-referentiality as deceit can be found in the fact that the narrator is, like Fogwill, a scholar. As Rocío Fit notes, Fogwill has always been widely recognized as 'un escritor sumamente sagaz ... y un intelectual' (Fit, 2014: 88). In this context, the intellectual dimension attributed

to Fogwill's public figure could be identified with the narrator's profession; and this identification could lead the reader to assume that the narrator is a man. Although this assumption is possible, it does not satisfactorily explain the narrator's discomfort within the university's working environment during an intervention by the military forces in 1975, the narrator explicitly says: 'Tuve miedo de que me despidieran' (Fogwill, 1983: 6). Insofar as this sensation is brought up in a narrative context where there is no reference to a link between the narrator and any allegedly suspicious or subversive activity, the sexuality of the narrator becomes a feasible explanation for the fear of getting fired.

A similar situation is drawn when the narrator 'blanquea' before the military authorities. During that particular time, the term 'blanquear' meant 'contar [a las autoridades militares] lo que uno pensaba, lo que sabía que pensaban o hacían los otros y lo que pensaba que hacían, pensaban o sabían los otros' (Fogwill, 1983: 6). In the case of Fogwill's story, it is said that the narrator goes to 'blanquear', but in a context in which there is no specific reference to what is or what is worth being 'blanqueado'. In this frame, a reader aware of the prejudices and persecution of homosexuality during the dictatorship period could see the narrator's sexuality as a possible explanation for going to 'blanquear'. As has been stated in the introduction of this thesis, 'the 1976 military coup ... declared homosexuality to be one of the many types of subversion to be fought' (Díez, 2011: 15). As a result, 'the harassment, torture and murder of homosexuals became government policy during this darkest period of Argentine history' (Díez, 2011: 16). Thus, the knowledge of the prior policy could lead the reader to accurately guess that the veiled sexuality of the narrator has something to do with the 'blanqueo'. However, as there are no details of the dialogue between the narrator and the military officers, it is impossible for the reader to decide if that is the case. Moreover, if the reader decides to link the fear that leads the narrator to 'blanquear' to a wider, rather generalized feeling of fear attributed to the period, s/he can still easily hold on to the idea that the narrator is a man.

Finally, 'y para sorpresa del lector' (Marimón, Aizenberg, 2012: 9), the narrator's sexuality is revealed. Once it is said that Franca and the narrator have already separated, the first sentence that explicitly employs a grammatically

gendered adjective is used: 'Yo fui la única por quien [Franca] sintió algo ... sincero en la vida' (Fogwill, 1983: 7; emphasis added). Through this sentence, the narrator is identified as a woman -or at least, she is discursively. From this point, the reader makes a minimal move through which s/he infers that, if the narrator is a woman, then the couple is homosexual.

Given the fact that by this stage there have been many clues suggesting that the narrator might not be a man or might be a woman, the fact that the narrator's revelation of her sexuality comes as a 'sorpresa' (Marimón, Aizenberg, 2012: 9) insinuates something about the implied reader. Firstly, it implies that all the clues suggesting that the narrator is a man have prevailed over the ones indicating otherwise. This might be explained by two complementary presuppositions: the fact that the reader's first instinct is to attribute to the narrator the same sexuality as that of the author and the fact that the clues that suggest that the narrator is a man are non-ambiguous and straightforward, while the clues that imply that the narrator might not be a man are frequently ambivalent or vague. In order for this supposition to work effectively, Fogwill is able to draw upon a specific notion of man. In this sense, if these clues have worked upon the reader, it is because his / her very conception of man is precisely the one that the text presupposed that the reader would hold. This concept of man is tied to a definition of masculinity that involves a series of specific habits, practices, work fields and even body types. By attributing this set of features to the narrator, the text leads the reader to imagine a man who possesses features of a stereotypical type of masculinity.

Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that the presumptions made by the reader are somehow less critical than the ones assumed by the characters in the story, as shown by the events that follow the revelation of the couple's sexuality. Within the text, the openness about the narrator's sexuality is followed by the description of the narrator's routine with her new partner Claudia, which -through the reference to a scene of hysteria followed by the narrator tying the lover with a belt- seems to be identical to the scene between the narrator and Franca. The repetition of this pattern suggests that the narrator is still involved in a relationship whose dynamics include one lover -here, the narrator- acting according to conventions of masculinity (activity and

domination), while the other acts according to conventions of femininity (passivity and subjugation).²⁰

According to Alison Eves, this kind of bond can be defined as 'butch/femme' (Eves, 2004: 480) and represents 'the most recognizable lesbian archetype' (Eves, 2004: 480); as such, it stereotypically involves a woman endorsing 'a whole spectrum of masculine gender preferences' (Eves, 2004: 483) and another woman whose behaviour mirrors 'heterosexual performances of femininity' (Eves, 2004: 494). From Judith Butler's perspective, the appropriation of the conventions of masculinity by one of the lovers in this butch/femme dynamics is resistant to the mandatory movement according to which 'a female body' (Butler, 1990: 6) is pushed to assume a set of conventional feminine behaviours. Moreover, as this appropriation of masculine normalizations highlights the possibility of appropriation itself, it holds the emancipatory potential that Butler also sees in the figure of the drag queen for the denaturalization of the rigidity of gender regulations. However, this potential is not equal to the actual subversion or questioning of the very dichotomy of sex/gender. As Butler underlines: 'there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion, and that drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms' (Butler, 1993: 125). A similar statement can be posed in relation to the butch/femme relationship embraced by the characters: as it supposes the performance of stereotypical masculine and feminine behaviours, it can contribute to the reification of the dichotomous structure that both justifies and preserves heteronormative norms as such.²¹

Nonetheless, the characters' presumptions based on which their butch/femme bond is constructed should not be confused with the text's perspective on this bond. By highlighting the stereotypical dimension of this kind of dynamics and by making evident to the reader the presumptions on which his / her notions of man and woman are based -that is to say, by surprising the

²⁰ It should be noted that these conventions are not called into question along with the dichotomy sex/gender to which they are tied.

²¹ It is worth mentioning that, although the butch/femme dynamics can contribute to strengthen the dichotomous structure on which it relies when rigidly or stereotypically performed (as in the case of Fogwill's characters); when enacted critically, flexibly and/or hyperbolically, it can be also interpreted as a 'tactic in resisting heterosexual space and demanding lesbian presence' (Eves, 2004: 480).

reader with the fact that their notions of man and woman are based on stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity- the text shows awareness of the conventional nature of these categories. In this respect, it could be suggested that 'la larga risa de todos estos años' (Fogwill, 1983: 1) has been critically directed towards the reader's naivety and is going to be long-lasting and contemporary for as long as the reader keeps being surprised by the same set of presumptions regarding the narrator's sexuality and gendered identity.

However, the critical dimension of the text towards the sex/gender dichotomies has its limits as the story does not show or open up the path for new alternatives outside that very dichotomous structure. In regard to the narrator's sexuality, although the clues that suggest the narrator is not a man do not mandate that the narrator is a woman, they rely on the fact that the reader is going to be at best divided between two choices: either the narrator is a woman or the narrator is a man. Moreover, the text confirms that it has been relying on this disjunctive by solving the narrator's sexuality within these two possibilities as, at the end of the text, it is confirmed that the narrator is a woman. In terms of the narrator's gendered identity -which is related to her sexuality- the text also oscillates between two extremes: one based around stereotypical ideas of masculinity and another around stereotypical ideas regarding femininity. In this sense, the possibility for disobedience is conditioned by a restricted number of combinations carried within a dichotomous structure that, even when criticized, is not replaced.

All things considered, it can be argued that, to some extent, the text is resistant to the gendered normativities of its time. By forcing the reader to confront his / her own prejudices and by making both visible and relevant a sexual identity that was condemned at that period, the story is highly critical of that condemnation. However, by preserving the dichotomous terms on which heteronormative sexuality relies, the text does not offer an alternative of disobedience that would allow these terms to be historically superseded.

Chapter 3: Señorita

The nouvelle *Señorita* was published in 1999, a date that is tied to the severe recession that affected Argentina from 1998 and led to an unprecedented economic, political and social crisis in 2001.²² Although the story was published in the late 1990s, it is set between the years 1945-1955, a period that can be mapped almost directly onto the first two presidencies of Juan Domingo Perón. Perón ushered in many changes for women, such as sanctioning their right to vote and their increasing professionalization; as a result of these changes, the traditional notion of womanhood started being questioned and transformed.²³ In this sense, Uhart's nouvelle tells the story of 'una chica ... que ensaya para ser señorita' (Uhart, 1999: 14) in a moment when the very concept of 'señorita' was being debated and redefined. Besides being pertinent to the debates of the time in which the story is set, the definition of what a *señorita* is or should be -as seen in relation to the assumption of specific gender and sexual roles-, is also central to the plot of Uhart's story.²⁴

²² As Ana Castellani and Mariano Szkolnik underline 'los proyectos devaluacionista y dolarizador elaborados por diferentes fracciones de los sectores dominantes' (Castellani, Szkolnik, 2005: 2) led to 'la crisis terminal de la Convertibilidad (1999-2001)' (Castellani, Szkolnik, 2005: 2). During that period, 'surgen colectivos editoriales independientes' (Szpilbarg, 2010: 14) that allowed for the publication and circulation of Uhart's nouvelle. In 1999, Uhart's *Señorita* was printed by the independent publisher Simurg.

²³ According to Silvana Palermo's study, with 'la discusión por la sanción de la ley de sufragio femenino en 1947 ... se fue modificando la definición de femineidad con la que tradicionalmente se había justificado la exclusión política de la mujer' (Palermo, 1997: 151). This context of renovation of the very concept of womanhood, in which the story of Uhart is set, is specifically highlighted as one of the main 'transformaciones históricas del significado de las nociones de femineidad' (Palermo, 1997: 152). The concept of womanhood that is being debated in the story, and the predominance of that concept despite the fledging critiques against it, can be succinctly found in Rosario Castellanos' poem 'Kinsey Report'. Based on the 1953 survey of that name into women's sexual behaviours, the poem suggests that -during the 50s- a 'señorita' was expected to be 'joven ... no fea' and to behave according to the ideal of the dependent housekeeping wife and mother; in accordance with men's expectations. Castellanos' text, which reproduces the voice of a so-called *señorita*, states: 'Señorita. Sí, insisto. Señorita. / Soy joven ... Carácter / llevadero. Y un día / vendrá el Príncipe Azul, porque se lo he rogado / como un milagro a San Antonio. Entonces / vamos a ser felices. Enamorados siempre / ... Si es mujeriego / yo voy a mantenerme siempre tan atractiva / tan atenta a sus gustos, tan buena ama de casa, / tan prolífica madre / y tan extraordinaria cocinera, / que se volverá fiel como premio a mis méritos, / entre los que el mayor es la paciencia' (Castellanos, 1972: 332-333). As will be shown below, the concept of *señorita* that the poem depicts is coincident with the traditional meaning of the term, as defined by the most conservative characters in Uhart's story. This traditional meaning is precisely the one that other female characters try to dispute and challenge by enacting supposedly improper behaviours.

²⁴ The meaning of certain linguistic terms historically associated with specific gender and sexual identities, as well as the reformulation and questioning of the historically prevalent meaning of those terms, are also central to Mariano Blatt's and Hernan Vanoli's texts. Therefore, the present focus on the

Although this relation between the ideal of a *señorita* and the assumption of specific gender and sexual roles is essential to the text's deployment, it is also an aspect that has received scant attention from contemporary theorists.²⁵ To address the subject and its centrality in relation to the story, this chapter will explore the ways in which possible definitions of what constitutes a *señorita* are represented across the text by a series of female characters. These characters express what it means to be a *señorita* in two qualitatively different ways: firstly, they explicitly describe to the narrator how she should behave in order to become a *señorita*; and secondly, the characters seek to embody such behaviour. At the same time, the model of behaviour that each female character embodies as part of her identity as a *señorita* is always tied to a concept of femininity and womanhood that the narrator tries to grasp and/or imitate. I will study the ways in which both the behaviours and the discourses of other female characters influence the narrator's ideas of femininity and her own conduct. In order to do so, I will be looking at the narrator's relationship with each individual character in the story.

The first character that is shown to be influential is 'la tía Elisa' (Uhart, 1999: 15). According to the rules set in Elisa's house, a *señorita* must develop a sense of restraint and moderation that should be then translated into her conduct; for instance, when a *señorita* eats, she must not eat 'fuera de hora, ni mucho, ni muy ligero, porque es de mal gusto' (Uhart, 1999: 11). This association between femininity and rigid table manners coincides with books published at the time, such as the lifestyle publication *Future Perfect: A Guide to Personality and Popularity for the Junior Miss*, where the way in which a 'junior miss' should 'hold a spoon ... at the table' is even included (Morgan Bryant, 1944: 141). From Jermaine Harris' perspective, this particular association between women and table manners is framed within a long-term relation between femininity and restraint; according to which 'ideal womanhood' is accomplished through 'tasteful moderation' (Harris, 2011: 56). In the Argentinean context, this ideal of moderation as tied to femininity was

concept of *señorita* will be mirrored in the following chapters by looking at terms such as 'pibe' and 'mina'.

²⁵ In this sense, the review 'Relatos de familia' (1999) published by Carolina Arenes and Silvia Hopenhayn's analysis 'Encantar el mundo cotidiano' (2010) illustrate the way in which literary theorists have specifically highlighted Hebe Uhart's literary style to the detriment of the constant thematization and the questions formulated by her texts in relation to the standards of 'femininity' and 'womanhood'.

specifically encouraged by ‘las publicaciones femeninas’ (Bonifacini, 2013: 3) in which ‘discursos católicos, tradicionalistas y nacionalistas se filtraron ... indicando a sus lectoras -a modo de guía- qué es lo bueno, lo reprochable, etc’ (Bonifacini, 2013: 3). According to Eliana Bonifacini’s study of Argentinean women’s magazines published between the 1930s and the 1940s, massive publications such as *Revista Para Ti* were used to promote a concept of femininity associated with ‘la imagen de mujer anclada en la procreación, la dependencia y la sumisión’ (Bonifacini, 2013: 2).²⁶

This overall ideal of moderation and submission is utterly enacted by the character of Nora, the narrator’s childhood friend. From the narrator’s viewpoint, both Nora and her mother are particularly ‘reservadas’ (Uhart, 1999: 25). According to the story, Nora’s mother ‘estaba siempre ... prolija y discreta’ (Uhart, 1999: 24), while Nora ‘iba tan limpia y compuesta ... [manteniendo] esa tesitura también en los juegos de paleta’ (Uhart, 1999:24). The emphasis placed on Nora’s ‘compostura’ is specifically relevant as within the text, ‘[ir] más compuesta’ (Uhart, 1999: 35) is explicitly equivalent to ‘ser más señorita’ (Uhart, 1999: 35). As the years go by, this attitude towards moderation is radicalized to the extent that Nora’s mother starts forbidding Nora to go outside; as Nora explains to the narrator: ‘[no salgo] porque ahora soy una señorita y mi mamá no quiere que me vean las piernas’ (Uhart, 1999: 27). Although the reason why Nora becomes a *señorita* at this point remains unclear for the narrator -who states that ‘no había ninguna transformación visible’ (Uhart, 1999: 27)-, it could be supposed that the moment in which Nora appears as a *señorita* in the eyes of her mother coincides with the time of her first period. This turning point is presented along with other habits that, as a *señorita*, Nora is encouraged to endorse from then on, such as ‘dejar de jugar a la paleta’ (Uhart, 1999: 27) and start being interested in ‘conversar’ (Uhart, 1999: 27). As Janet Flammang points out, this particular interest in ‘the courtesy of conversation ... is

²⁶ Although *Para Ti* was a specifically conservative magazine, traditional concepts of womanhood were also found in relatively progressive publications such as *Vosotras*; which position in favor of ‘un modelo de mujer trabajadora e independiente ... encuentra sus límites en el refuerzo del rol tradicional de la mujer como esposa y madre’ (Bonifacini, 2013: 13). According to Isabella Cosse, who studied Argentinean women’s magazines published between the 1950s and the 1970s, innovative woman’s publications such as *Claudia* (first issued in 1957) were also caught in the contradiction of presenting themselves as ‘revistas de carácter moderno’ (Cosse, 2011: 4) while often defining the ideal woman as ‘ama de casa, esposa y madre’ (Cosse, 2011: 4).

associated with historically feminine characteristics' (Flammang, 2009: 99). These historically feminine characteristics are tied to a notion of femininity, according to which 'women should structure [their] world by means of the dominant group's model and vocabulary' (Burke, 1993: 114).²⁷

A similar sense of decency is initially encouraged by the narrator's mother. According to her, a *señorita* is someone that always 'pide permiso' (Uhart, 1999:14) and behaves quietly and moderately. As the narrator points out, she could move and dance in her house, but must do so 'sin ruido' (Uhart, 1999: 15). At the beginning of the story, the mother also appears as a housewife for whom the narrator 'le secaba los platos' (Uhart, 1999: 15) and from whom the narrator used to learn how to clean and wash. From this perspective, the notion of *señorita* -as a young girl who ultimately 'ensaya para ser señora' (Uhart, 1999: 11)- seems to be similar to the moderate concept of *señorita* that was described in the previous paragraphs.²⁸ In addition, the narrator's mother represents an essential standpoint from which the narrator seems to be constitutively or specifically unable to fulfil the ideal of a *señorita* as such. Even when the narrator dresses up and goes to the hairdressers in order to look 'compuesta' (Uhart, 1999: 35) for a party, her mother merely states: 'Está pasable' (Uhart, 1999: 11). This point of view can be associated with a concept of femininity that is 'far too demanding' (Hymowitz, 2011: 10), but it can also point to the fact that the standards of what that mother expects from her daughter are in that case especially high.

Alongside these female characters who embody what a *señorita* should be, there are other characters in the story that are relevant insofar as they represent precisely what a *señorita* should not be and offer a model of how a

²⁷ As Peter Burke emphasises, 'women do not simply happen to speak differently from men. In many places, they have been and are trained to speak differently, to express their social subordination in a hesitant or 'powerless' variety of language' (Burke, 1993: 114). In this frame, the rules of conversation that Nora is interested in learning during that time are tied to this highly conservative model of subjugation in which frame women are supposed to 'smile obligingly, excuse themselves and stutter, or in fits of insecurity attempt to imitate and outdo men' (Burke, 1993: 115).

²⁸ It should be noted that, although Fogwill's story and Uhart's nouvelle depict and call into question stereotypical ideas of femininity, the stereotypical idea of femininity described in 'La larga risa de todos esos años' differs from the one depicted in *Señorita*. In this sense, while Fogwill's story associates a stereotypical feminine woman with hysteria, lust, madness and jealousy, Uhart's text associates stereotypical feminine girls with composure, prudence, self-restraint and moderation. That being said, the stereotype of femininity which is enacted by the character of Franca –the partner of Fogwill's narrator who works as a prostitute– can be seen as opposed to the stereotype of femininity enacted by young Nora within Uhart's story.

señorita should not act. Through her interaction with these characters, the narrator ought to be able to discern what separates a *señorita* from a ‘chica’ (Uhart, 1999:10) who does not merit that title yet.

The first character that models the type of behaviour not expected of a *señorita* is the narrator’s friend Mary. According to the narrator, in Mary’s house ‘a cada habitante le sobraba o le faltaba algo’ (Uhart, 1999:25). If a *señorita* is someone who is composed and reserved so that nothing gets out of proportion, then Mary’s house represents the exact opposite. The same contrast between what a *señorita* should be and what she should not, can be found in Mary’s looks and behaviour: if a *señorita* must look ‘limpia y compuesta’ (Uhart, 1999: 24), Mary looked always disheveled and ‘sucia’ (Uhart, 1999: 35); if a *señorita* is someone who should not be exposing herself and should be especially moderate when eating, Mary ‘comía pan por la calle’ (Uhart, 1999: 26). A similar contrast can be found in relation to Mary’s education; while a *señorita* must be educated in order to develop ‘the courtesy of conversation’ (Flammang, 2009: 99), Mary ‘no iba al secundario’ (Uhart, 1999: 35). In the text, Mary is opposed to the concept of *señorita* in yet another way; from the narrator’s point of view, Mary has a ‘perspectiva biológica de la vida’ (Uhart, 1999: 26) that is opposed to the ‘perspectiva moral’ (Uhart, 1999: 26) that a *señorita* should possess. Within this biological perspective on life, Mary is able to speak carelessly about how ‘le había visto las tetas a la abuela’ (Uhart, 1999: 26), insofar as ‘todo eso le parecía natural’ (Uhart, 1999: 26). Taking into account the contrast between Mary’s behaviour and what is supposedly suitable for a *señorita*, it is clear that the character of Mary represents the exact opposite of the character of Nora. While Nora represents an extreme notion of what a *señorita* should be, Mary represents what a *señorita* should not be, placing the narrator in the middle of two opposite poles.

A similar relationship between two opposing figures can be found as the character of ‘la otra’ (Uhart, 1999: 20) appears in the text. Within the story, ‘la otra’ (Uhart, 1999: 20) is the woman with whom the narrator’s neighbour, who is a scientist, is unfaithful to his wife. The fact of this affair, which the narrator discovers by overhearing an adult conversation between her mother and her aunts, is first addressed by them in ‘un tono serio’ (Uhart, 1999: 21). A serious

tone is also used regarding the matter when the narrator pictures herself looking her neighbour's wife in the eye; with the knowledge that the wife has been deceived, the narrator can only refer to the husband's affair as 'eso' (Uhart, 1999: 21). By not saying what 'eso' (Uhart, 1999: 21) is, the affair remains something that is taboo precisely because engaging in such activity does not fit into the desirable behaviour of a *señora*, which is seen as a continuation of the behaviour of a *señorita*. Thus, in this context the wife is portrayed as a victim and as the ideal representation of a *señora*, whereas 'la otra' (Uhart, 1999: 20) is identified with the opposite pole.

Nevertheless, the cohesion of these characters that seem to represent one of two opposite poles does not last until the end of the story. During the ten years that the story covers, these characters that are initially presented as either identifiable or not with the concept of *señorita* call the concept itself into question. In regard to the character of 'la tía Elisa' (Uhart, 1999: 15), the narrator states that, although she was the one who told her that 'una chica es la que ensaya para ser señorita' (Uhart, 1999: 16) and she taught her how to behave like one, in her house 'festejaban si alguien se caía al suelo, los pedos y las equivocaciones al hablar' (Uhart, 1999: 9). This contradiction shows how 'en esa casa había una sorprendente mezcla de coacción y libertad' (Uhart, 1999: 12); according to which a girl 'debía ser prudente ... y pelar arvejas mientras conversaba y levantarse a abrir la puerta si tocaban el timbre' (Uhart, 1999: 13), but at the same time she was free to play on the street by only 'decirlo' (Uhart, 1999: 12).²⁹

While this assertive behaviour and the celebration of clumsiness are explicitly forbidden in the narrator's house, the narrator's mother is precisely the one that says to her: 'Podés seguir cualquier carrera pero vas a trabajar para tus gastos' (Uhart, 1999: 64). Although this statement includes the restrictive connector 'pero', which fits the temperament of the demanding mother, it also supposes a sense of freedom that was not frequent among women at that time. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the story is set in a period in which women were allowed to vote for the first time and were gradually starting to professionalize, so the idea of a woman that could both have a career and a job

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In this context, 'decirlo' (Uhart, 1999: 12) is opposed to asking politely to go outside and play.

was far from conservative. According to José Fuster Retali's analysis, during that time 'se permitió lentamente que muchas mujeres comenzaran a considerar la posibilidad de mejores condiciones de trabajo' (Fuster Retali, 2000: 7), but the actual change in the professional and the working field was far from being accomplished. In this sense, the fact that the narrator's mother gives her the freedom to choose any career can be seen in contrast to the labors of 'dactilografía, costura y tejido' (Fuster Retali, 2000: 7); which were frequently taught to and associated with *señoritas*.³⁰

In this context, the very concept of *señorita*, which the character of Nora seemed to embody perfectly, starts being questioned by the behaviour of Nora herself. After a period in which they do not relate to each other, the narrator comes across Nora at the library, where the narrator goes to 'devolver un libro' (Uhart, 1999: 51) and sees Nora playing ping-pong among 'varias chicas y muchachos' (Uhart, 1999: 51). Through this scene, it is not only suggested that Nora has left aside her reserved attitude, but it is also shown that she has regained her will to play.³¹ Moreover, it is suggested that she has developed a more relaxed personality that allows her to relate naturally with both women and men. This personality is reiterated when Nora is the one who approaches the narrator and invites her to play ping-pong with her.

This move away from the role of *señorita* by each character over time, although not fully developed, is also present in the later descriptions of Mary. In this case, the narrator states that, through the years, Mary was encouraged to follow a process of self-improvement that 'había mejorado un poco su forma de vestir y ... ya sus zapatillas no estaban sucias' (Uhart, 1999: 35). From Mary's new physical appearance and the significance of that appearance in relation to the ideal of femininity, it can be inferred that Mary's closeness to the standard of *señorita* might be understood as inversely proportional to Nora's distance from the same standard (as seen in the episode of the ping-pong game). If this interpretation is valid, then through this brief reference to Mary the story

³⁰ The fact that women's professionalization was a particularly slow process can be also grasped by looking at Fogwill's story. Although Fogwill's text is set thirty years later than Uhart's *Señorita*, the intellectual profession of the narrator is still considered stereotypically and predominantly masculine.

³¹ In this sense, ping-pong can be understood as the adult version of 'jugar a la paleta' (Uhart, 1999: 24).

reinterprets this relation between two fixed opposites as a dynamic relationship in which the roles might be rearranged or inverted.

A similar shift is seen in the character of 'la otra' (Uhart, 1999: 20), whose bad reputation is firstly transformed by a reference to the scientist's spouse, who was initially presented as a victim. According to what the narrator overhears, 'no bien la vio [a la otra], la mujer del científico se puso a galopar ... y a darle golpes, y la otra, huía' (Uhart, 1999: 21). While analysing the behaviour of the scientist's wife, the narrator asks herself how it is possible that the 'señora seguía siendo considerada tal, si no manifestó ni armonía ni contención' (Uhart, 1999: 21); correlatively, the narrator starts developing empathy 'por la otra' (Uhart, 1999: 22). Years after the episode of the affair, this empathy is reiterated when the narrator starts working as a teacher and finds out that the principal of the school who is addressed as 'señorita directora' (Uhart, 1999: 69) is actually 'la otra' (Uhart, 1999: 20). Through this identification between 'la amante' (Uhart, 1999: 20) and 'la señorita directora' (Uhart, 1999: 69), the text makes the two opposite poles coalesce once again in a single character.³² Moreover, as the non-cohesive figure of 'la otra' (Uhart, 1999: 20) is seen along with the non-coherent figure of the scientist's wife, they both call into question the possibility of ever fully enacting the role of *señoritas* and/or *señoras*. Among all these female characters and their contradictions, the narrator seems lost from the beginning, to the point when she explicitly asks herself: '¿Y dónde estaba yo ... siempre en el medio de todo?' (Uhart, 1999: 28). This ambiguous position can be noted in each of her relationships with the other female characters, who she admires to some extent but at the same time questions in a way that does not allow her to embody any of the versions of a *señorita* that are encouraged.

Although 'la tía Elisa' (Uhart, 1999: 15) is worshipped by the narrator, who thinks that her house was 'de gran aprendizaje' (Uhart, 1999: 12) and contained 'centros de interés' (Uhart, 1999: 16), her embodiment of the role of a *señora* as 'alguien que ha sufrido mucho, pero que no debe permitir que se le note' (Uhart, 1999: 15) seems out-dated in the eyes of the narrator. This model

³² The reputation of 'la señorita directora' (Uhart, 1999: 69) is also praised by the narrator's mother, who states that the principal is 'una excelente persona' (Uhart, 1999: 68).

of *señora* is questioned by the narrator when she states that if a grown woman was condemned to that silence, then she would opt for a ‘prolongación de las etapas de la vida’ (Uhart, 1999: 17) that allowed her to behave as a *señorita* or as a *chica* for a longer period of time. Nevertheless, the very concept of ‘chica [como] alguien que va pasa señorita’ (Uhart, 1999: 14), as seen in Elisa’s house, does not convince the narrator either. As she says: ‘allí el modelo de chica ... era una que vino de visita ... los movimientos de esa chica eran siempre sugerentes ... como diciendo: «Aquí no ha pasado nada» ... pero esa chica me pellizcó y yo asocié su capacidad de ser *señorita* con su maldad’ (Uhart, 1999: 15). Through this passage, it can be noted that what a *señorita* shares with a *señora* is the capacity to behave moderately in public while feeling or behaving in the opposite way when not being observed. This is an attitude that the narrator questions by being suspicious of both role models.

A similar questioning of the behaviour expected of a *señorita* seems to occur at the narrator’s house: when her mother asks her to clean the furniture, which she should do within her role as a *señorita*, the narrator states that ‘los muebles [l]e producían verdadero fastidio, y cada vez los limpiaba peor’ (Uhart, 1999: 28). Instead of embodying the model of the housewife, the narrator initially suggests that ‘la gente debería vivir al aire libre’ (Uhart, 1999: 28), which is why ‘[s]e sentaba debajo de un mandarino y comía directamente de la planta, sin parar’ (Uhart, 1999: 28). However, that rebellious behaviour is accompanied by a sense of guilt that leads the narrator to a position of relative compromise; in this case, she ends up deciding that ‘en cuanto a los muebles, no los iba a limpiar a fondo ... pero iba a repasar las superficies para que nadie me retara’ (Uhart, 1999: 29). By settling for this compromise, which does not completely reject but does not fully embody the behaviour of a *señorita*, the narrator manages to evade the restraints of the ideal model while not being admonished for doing so.

However, this position ‘en el medio de todo’ (Uhart, 1999: 28) is often uncomfortable for the narrator, as can be seen in her relationship with both Nora and Mary. When the narrator sees herself in contrast to the conservative attitude of young Nora, ‘la actitud [de Nora] ponía de relieve ante [sus] ojos su veta grosera’ (Uhart, 1999: 63). Inversely, when the narrator sees herself in

contrast to young Mary, she thinks of herself as more educated and more 'justa' (Uhart, 1999: 31), which is why, although she firstly sees Mary's attitudes as 'una curiosidad' (Uhart, 1999: 31), she finally decides to establish some distance between the two. When the narrator later sees Mary as more 'compuesta' (Uhart, 1999: 35), she observes that this process of self-restraint has left her 'triste y a la sombra' (Uhart, 1999: 35) and she also notes that now Mary is the one that 'la rehuía a ella' (Uhart, 1999: 35). On the contrary, when the narrator later sees Nora, Nora is the one that approaches the narrator spontaneously and invites her to play while the narrator is only at the library to return a book. In this scene, there is a feeling of discomfort coming from the narrator's loneliness and sudden shyness as opposed to Nora's spontaneous, friendly, relaxed attitude. This discomfort is also felt by the narrator when she starts assuming the role of 'maestra' (Uhart, 1999: 65) and, as such, she is addressed as *señorita* by her pupils. To prove to herself that she can fit for once into her role, she nervously repeats: 'Yo soy la maestra, yo soy la maestra' (Uhart, 1999: 65). At the end of her first day, finding herself in the mess of the classroom, she concludes that 'no sabía cómo componer todo eso' (Uhart, 1999: 66); however, that feeling of failure is eased when the narrator comes across 'la señorita directora' (Uhart, 1999: 66) and observes that 'la seguridad de ella me tranquilizaba' (Uhart, 1999: 66). Through the words of the principal, who encourages her by saying 'vas muy bien, vas a ver que vas a ir muy bien' (Uhart, 1999: 66), the narrator finds a sense of comfort that coincides with a sense of ease not only between the two women, but also between the narrator and the ideal of femininity that she is supposed to fulfil. As the narrator points out, it was fine to firmly pursue a goal or to fit a role, 'pero de vez en cuando se podía descansar un rato' (Uhart, 1999: 63). This appreciation of temporarily freeing herself from the rigid restraints within the social roles of *señorita* and/or *señorita maestra* is again evident in the aforementioned episode, where the narrator finds out that 'la señorita directora' (Uhart, 1999: 69) is 'la otra' (Uhart, 1999: 20). From the narrator's point of view, if even 'la señorita directora' (Uhart, 1999: 69) who represents the epitome of 'una excelente persona' (Uhart, 1999: 68) is unable to behave according to the standards of a *señorita*, then the very concept of *señorita* is constitutively flawed or unattainable by one person. Through this realization, which is suggested at the very end of the story, the narrator seems to conclude

not only that the ideal of *señorita* is impossible to fully attain, but that it is acceptable not to do so.

This conclusion is particularly relevant to the text's position in relation to gendered identities and sexual roles. As most of the characters seem to adhere to these at the beginning of the story, or at least occupy a position that is at one pole or the other in relation to the concept of a *señorita*, the narrator feels inadequate for being 'en el medio' (Uhart, 1999: 28). Nevertheless, the fact that the characters show greater complexity and more contradictions over time suggests that being caught in between is not something that happens only to the narrator, but to the other characters as well. As none of the characters manage to behave within the restraints of the ideal role of *señorita*, what is called into question is the attainability of the ideal itself. Moreover, what constitutes a *señorita* is defined differently by multiple characters that differ greatly from each other, so the term *señorita* cannot be identified with one single ideal. In this sense, *señorita* gains different meanings when being uttered by Elisa, the narrator's mother or Nora's mother and those meanings differ from the particular appropriation by the narrator and Nora of the discourses that they hear surrounding the term.

Following Judith Butler's perspective, the ideal of a *señorita* cannot be fulfilled not only because its standards are too high, but because the meaning of the term is constitutively unstable and changeable, as are the standards attached to it. In Butler's words, the 'terms that are meant to establish a coherent identity are troubled by the very failure of discourse ... to finally and fully establish the identity to which it refers' (Butler, 1993: 191). In the context of Uhart's story, the meaning of *señorita* is constitutively subject to change and it is also being transformed by the characters in such a way that it cannot be identified with a single ideal or fixed set of behaviours. In this context, the persistent disorientation of the narrator and her feeling of discomfort can be explained by the fact that, behind the employment of the single term *señorita*, lie diverse and non-coherent ideas of the concept of femininity as enacted by young women.

Nevertheless, these meanings attached to the concept of *señorita*, while diverse and non-cohesive, are frequently similar and are not entirely

contradictory. In this sense, every feature that female characters explicitly associate with a *señorita*, such as ‘prudencia’ (Uhart, 1999: 12) or ‘compostura’ (Uhart, 1999: 24), all seem to point to a rather conservative notion of femininity. If this is the case, what disorientates the narrator is not only the diverse versions of the same concept, which are similar to each other, but the fact that the behaviour of the characters usually contradicts those characters’ ideas about what being a *señorita* means. In this context, choices taken such as when the narrator’s mother encourages her to choose any career, when ‘la señorita directora’ (Uhart, 1999: 69) chooses to sexually enact the role of ‘la amante’ (Uhart, 1999: 20) or when the narrator herself chooses not to clean properly, are deliberate and deliberately go against all similar stereotypes of femininity that lie behind the employment of the term *señorita*. In this sense, the contradiction between what the characters state that a *señorita* should be and their own behaviour during the story, can be understood in two ways: it can be interpreted as a failure in relation to the ideal(s) of *señorita*, but it can also be understood as a gesture of resistance towards that ideal. Since all the behaviours that contradict the ideal of *señorita* are deliberate actions, it can be suggested that Uhart’s characters are, to this extent, resistant to the ideals of femininity of its time.

However, the fact that these behaviours are resistant to the standards of femininity of the time in which the story is set, does not mean that the same behaviours are still considered resistant at the time of publication. As the features attributed to a *señorita* are less conservative in this later context, some of the features that the characters in the story used to see as resistant to the ideal of femininity are today part of the very ideal of femininity. In this sense, the roles of ‘la amante’ (Uhart, 1999: 20) -which in the story expresses freedom within the principal’s sexual life- or ‘la señorita maestra’ (Uhart, 1999: 68) - which expresses the possibility for the narrator to have a job while studying-; are not disobedient but almost expected from the women of today. As Alicia Fernández points out: ‘la maestra es casada, pero la llaman señorita ... los varones son señores siempre. Las mujeres, en cambio, para ser señoras, tenemos que ser señoras de algún señor’ (Fernández, 1992: 17). In this context, the roles of ‘la amante’ (Uhart, 1999: 20) or ‘la señorita maestra’ (Uhart, 1999: 68), do not resist but mostly reify the very dichotomies upon which sex/gender rely by

encouraging behaviours associated with what it is contemporarily identified with a feminine woman. At the same time, the fact that the ideal of a feminine woman has now changed its meaning by incorporating features that were considered disobedient four decades ago, supports Butler's hypothesis, according to which the meaning of the terms feminine and woman are always changeable and unstable.

This instability of the meaning of what constitutes a feminine woman, according to which behaviours that were considered relatively disobedient in the 1950s are now integral to a normalized notion of femininity, can make a contemporary reader overlook the resistant dimension of the characters' behaviours in the story, while concentrating on other aspects of the text. In this sense, Silvia Hopenhayn highlights that in Uhart's 'cuentos o breves novelas, lo más nimio cobra importancia por la forma en que se lo percibe y experimenta' (Hopenhayn, 2010); while Mariana Enríquez celebrates 'un modo de mirar [que] produce un modo de escribir, un estilo' (Enríquez, 2004). In this context, what is being highlighted is not the omnipresent thematization and critical resistance of the ideals of femininity, but the singularity that is employed by the main character to narrate a story about 'la inmigración, la familia, lo argentino' (Enríquez, 2004). The excessive attention that is paid to the narrator's mastery of these characteristics suggests that, while the behaviours opposed to the concept of *señorita* might have been resistant to the ideal of femininity encouraged at the time in which the story is set, they are not identified as disobedient by contemporary readers mainly because they are not resistant to today's ideal of femininity. This implies that certain contemporary readings fail to contextualize the female characters' behaviours in their particular historical frame and, by virtue of this lack of contextualization, the critical gesture of the characters' behaviours is overlooked. However, what is missed in these readings of the text is not only a critique of the concept of femininity during a specific period of time, but a critique of the ideal of femininity itself; which the text calls into question by criticizing the possibility of stabilizing and/or embodying any notion of femininity. In this sense, and in spite of this being overlooked by contemporary readings, the text remains resistant insofar as it highlights the instability and the impossibility of the fulfilment of any ideal of femininity as such.

Chapter 4: Increíble

Increíble by Mariano Blatt was published in 2007, a date that marks the last year of Néstor Kirchner's presidency and the closing of a period of the 'crecimiento económico rápido y sostenido ... después de una marcada recesión que había comenzado a mediados de 1998' (Sandoval, Weisbrot, 2007: 6). This context of economic stability and growth following the socio-economic collapse of 2001 was accompanied by a series of progressive political measures that included the legalization of same-sex civil union and the first public debates about the legalization of same-sex marriage.³³ In the editorial field, this economic recovery and political progress coincided with the '[surgimiento de] numerosas editoriales pequeñas, nacionales, muchas veces con producción cooperativa, que comenzaron a renovar el panorama de las publicaciones' (Szpilbarg, 2010: 2). This panorama not only facilitated the inclusion of an increasing number of young writers in 'la escena editorial' (Szpilbarg, 2010: 2), but it also facilitated the incorporation of former marginalized voices and perspectives into the literary scene.

Within this framework, critics and literary theorists have paid special attention to the particular voice and 'el tono' (Callero, 2008) in which Mariano Blatt presents 'lo sencillo y cotidiano ... de su entorno' (Figuerola, 2013); with 'una mirada orientada inteligentemente para poder conmovirse y ... asociar de una manera emotiva' (Figuerola, 2013). However, these approaches have rarely taken into consideration the way in which the assumption of a specific gendered identity and sexual orientation by Blatt's characters is central to his poems and stories.³⁴ This centrality is particularly relevant in the case of *Increíble*, as the

³³ As stated in the introduction of this thesis, by the date of this text's publication, same-sex civil union was officially legal in Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (2002), the Province of Río Negro (2003) and the city of Villa Carlos Paz (2007). At the same time, the first statements in favour of starting a same-sex marriage debate in congress were being issued along with an increasing number of academic publications favouring 'el argumento por la igualdad' (Gargarella, 2007: 655).

³⁴ For a more detailed approach to the lack of attention paid to the role of sexuality and gendered identity in Mariano Blatt works, see 'La mirada en El Paraíso. El Espacio Exterior' (Callero, 2008), 'El ruido de las estrellas a la noche toda abierta: Sobre Increíble de Mariano Blatt' (Figuerola, 2013) and 'Mariano Blatt: poesía completa + diario' (Rey, 2015).

text explores the changes in the experience and the place of homosexuality in the 'continuum of homosocial bonds' (Sedgwick, 1985: 694) -that is to say, the structure of the relations between individuals of the same sex-, within an historical context of cultural openness to new forms of social interaction and sexual desire. This contextualized exploration of the experience of homosexuality in a scenario of social transition and transformation, is initially expressed in Blatt's text via the introduction of a narrator who is a 'pibe' (Blatt, 2007: 1) that explicitly expresses his sexual attraction towards other 'pibes' (Blatt, 2007: 2).

Although the term *pibe* can be simply translated as 'young man' (Archetti, 2001: 154) or 'young boy' (Archetti, 2001: 154), it also represents 'a liminal figure in the construction of Argentinean masculinity' (Archetti, 2001: 155); which is marked by a set of what are supposed to be Argentinean manly features and habits including 'tomar cerveza' (Blatt, 2007: 4), 'jugar al fútbol' (Blatt, 2007: 3) and wearing sports clothing such as 'un short ... de All Boys' (Blatt, 2007: 4) or 'un buzo verde de Ferro' (Blatt, 2007: 4).³⁵ As a representative of the young Argentinean masculine man, the *pibe* is stereotypically 'un mejor amigo' (Blatt, 2007: 4); and engages in a form of intimate male bonding which historically depends on the fact that the 'masculine individuals involved are ... straight' (Sedgwick, 1985: 696). Even though Blatt's narrator portrays the *pibes* as they enact this manly heterosexual stereotype within the dynamics of 'un grupo de amigos' (Blatt, 2007: 6), he also sees the manly features which compose that very stereotype as objects of erotic desire. This erotization, which is central to an understanding of the experience of homosexuality from within a group whose members were historically pushed to be heterosexual masculine men, is the focus of both the second and the last parts of *Increíble*.

Within the second part of the text, the narrator emphatically eroticizes the so-called masculine features of a *pibe* who he calls 'El Pibe de Oro' (Blatt, 2007: 1). Even though El Pibe de Oro³⁶ is the well-known nickname given to the

³⁵ In this context, 'Ferro' stands for 'Club Ferro Carril Oeste' and 'All Boys' stands for 'Club Atlético All Boys', which are both soccer teams.

³⁶ As El Pibe de Oro is the character's nickname, it will not appear in italics within the body of the text.

soccer player Diego Armando Maradona, in Blatt's text this nickname does not refer -or does not refer exclusively- to the character's outstanding ability to play soccer.³⁷ Instead, the nickname is employed to emphasise that, from the narrator's perspective, the character of El Pibe de Oro 'brillaba todo el tiempo en todo lo que hacía y decía' (Blatt, 2007: 1). In this sense, a nickname usually employed to refer to an outstanding performance in a specific field is reused by the narrator to express the general erotic attractiveness and his particular erotic desire towards another *pibe*.

As a *pibe*, El Pibe de Oro shares with the others stereotypical masculine habits and aspects that the narrator describes in the light of his erotic desire. Firstly, the narrator emphasises that El Pibe de Oro 'tenía las manos tranquilas, la forma de moverlas' (Blatt, 2007: 1). According to Francisco Sánchez and Stephanie Greenberg's studies, this understated use of hand gestures coincides with an ideal of a masculine man who is 'tough looking [and] doesn't act demonstrative in public' (Greenberg, Sánchez, 2009: 87); at the same time, this non-demonstrative attitude is opposed to gestures associated with the feminine man who stereotypically 'talks with a lot of gesturing' (Greenberg, Sánchez, 2009: 87). This ideal of a masculine man as embodied by El Pibe de Oro is further reinforced when it is said that he 'hablaba poco, o mejor dicho, hablaba corto' (Blatt, 2007: 2). This vision of El Pibe de Oro as inexpressive and mostly silent coincides with a stereotypical figure of the masculine man according to which 'women speak more ... and are inherently more indirect' (Kaplan, 2016: 155). In other words, masculinity is associated with straight-forwardness and lack of verbal expressivity and stereotypical femininity is marked by unnecessary and abundant expressiveness.³⁸

The manly behaviour of El Pibe de Oro is again highlighted when the narrator states that 'hay algo en el modo en que el Pibe se saca la remera'

³⁷ As David Andrews and Steven Jackson point out, 'Argentinean football identity ... has reached its apotheosis in the form of Maradona, whose triumphs and tragedies, strengths and failures, have secured him a mythical position within the Argentinean popular imaginary. As such, Maradona mythology is inextricably related to a system of national cultural differences through which Argentinean identity continues to be imagined and experienced' (Andrews, Jackson, 2001: 13).

³⁸ It should be noted that, according to Kaplan's study, 'the idea that women talk three times as much as men is clearly a myth' (Kaplan, 2016: 175). In this sense, she incorporates such common belief in order to show that any fixed association between sex/gendered identities and speech is reductionist; as such, this kind of association contributes to the reification of the stereotypes of the masculine man and the feminine woman which are not adequate to scientifically describe 'living humans' (Kaplan, 2016: 175).

(Blatt, 2007: 1). In this case, the habit of ‘sacarse la remera’ -which is exclusively masculine insofar as ‘the nudity line is only drawn at the waist for men’ (Fahringer, 1993: 137)- is highlighted by the narrator as he finds that there is something special in the particular way in which el El Pibe de Oro enacts that conventional habit.³⁹ A similar erotization of a conventionally masculine habit occurs when the narrator is amazed by El Pibe de Oro ‘saliendo de la casa en short de fútbol’ (Blatt, 2007: 2); as has already been mentioned, ‘el short de fútbol’ (Blatt, 2007: 2) is the typical everyday outfit worn by the *pibe*. Another set of manly behaviours is eroticized as the narrator seems fascinated while El Pibe de Oro ‘ceba mate y relojea el paisaje’ (Blatt, 2007: 2). This description is particularly relevant as here El Pibe de Oro is portrayed as he enacts the typical habits of a ‘gaucho’ (Kaminsky, 2008: 56), a literary national figure that has historically shaped the mythology surrounding Argentinean masculine man as ‘he [the *gaucho*] always retains his connection to the land and his fierce hold on masculinity’ (Kaminsky, 2008: 56). By briefly assimilating the habits of El Pibe de Oro with the habits of a *gaucho*, the narrator establishes a continuity between the figure of the *gaucho* and the figure of the *pibe*, as they both shape the features of Argentinean masculinity that the narrator finds attractive. At the same time, as these particular habits of the *gaucho* are also contemporary habits of the *pibe*, the narration remains realistic and there is no disruptive cut between this portrait and the following narrative scene.

In the subsequent scene, El Pibe de Oro is seen playing ‘truco’ (Blatt, 2007: 3) with other *pibes*; one of them being the narrator himself. As David William Foster points out, *truco* is a card game which can be considered ‘the Argentinean equivalent to poker’ (Foster, 1998: 83) as it also involves a typically ‘male-male adversarial bond’ (Foster, 1998: 83) which is strongly associated with ‘manliness’ (Foster, 1998: 90). This manliness superimposed both on *truco* and poker can be understood in the context of Messerschmidt and Connell’s analysis, which poses that there is a wider presumption according to which sporting practice in general and the practice of ‘competitive sports’ (Connell,

³⁹ The extract regarding sex-based restrictions on the nudity line, quoted in the frame of H.P. Fahringer’s ‘Equal in All Things: Drawing the Line on Nudity’ (1993), and reiterated in the article ‘Jacob et al. v. The Community Standard of Tolerance: Substantive Equality, Indecency, and Topless Rights for Women’ (2000) by R. Konotopsky, is part of an argument in favor of women’s ‘constitutional right to carry on bare breasted in situations where men may do the same thing without rebuke’ (Konotopsky, 2000: 215).

Messerschmidt, 2005: 833) in particular are often associated with masculinity. From this perspective, the image of El Pibe de Oro playing *truco* highlights his masculinity by showing his competitive temperament and this competitive temperament is found erotic by the narrator precisely because it is stereotypically masculine. A similar erotization of this stereotypically masculine competitive side is shown when the narrator describes the movements of El Pibe de Oro while he is engaged in 'un partido de fútbol en el jardín' (Blatt, 2007: 3). As in the description of El Pibe de Oro playing *truco*, this image also highlights the connection between manhood and sporting practice, but it is even more attached to stereotypical masculinity as it involves a man playing 'body-contact confrontational sports' (Connell, Messerschmidt, 2005: 832). As Yiannakis and Melnick underline, this kind of erotization can be understood in the context of a stereotypical fetish for 'hypermasculinity associated with ... sports such as football' (Melnick, Yannakis, 2000: 233), which involves seeing '[sport] players and athletic bodies ... as erotic objects' (Melnick, Yannakis, 2000: 234).

However, the narrator's fetishes associated with stereotypical manly features become less conventional when he describes 'hasta el olor que [El Pibe de Oro] debe tener en la piel, abajo del brazo, entre las piernas' (Blatt, 2007: 2) as 'todo un sueño' (Blatt, 2007: 2). Even though this erotization of body odour can almost seem parodic as these smells are generally and conventionally considered 'anti-erogenous' (Jellinek, 1997: 240), the attraction for these scents can be also associated with an 'historically exalted' (Aspria, 2009: 2) fetish for 'body parts ... with a strong smell' (Aspria, 2009: 2) and it can be even considered 'a marker of intimacy in close relationships' (Aspria, 2009: 13). From the latter perspective, El Pibe de Oro's body odour -which might have been considered 'the repulsive smell of 'the other'' (Aspria, 2009: 13) from the viewpoint of a stranger-, seems realistically attractive for the narrator as there is an intimate homosocial bond established between El Pibe de Oro and him. A similar statement can be applied to the description of El Pibe de Oro's teeth, as the narrator states: 'Tiene los dientes sucios, pero para mí que no se los lave' (Blatt, 2007: 2). In this particular case, the use of the expression 'para mí' emphasises that it is only from (and for) the narrator's perspective that the dirtiness of El Pibe de Oro's teeth can be found appealing; which supports that

the attractiveness of these typically anti-erogenous features is based on the fact that there is a close relationship between the narrator and El Pibe de Oro.

At this stage, it is clear that the narrator is attracted to the stereotypical manly features of the *pibe* as they are particularly embodied by El Pibe de Oro, but that does not prove the initial hypothesis of this chapter; according to which the narrator sees those stereotypical features as objects of erotic desire regardless of the particular *pibe* who enacts them. Thus, a detailed analysis of the third part of *Increíble* serves precisely to prove that point. During the third part, a narrative poem entitled 'El Paraíso, El Espacio Exterior' in which the character of El Pibe de Oro is suddenly removed, the word *pibe* appears 52 times and the word 'chico' -which is employed as a synonym of *pibe*- appears another 20 times. This means that the locus of 'El Paraíso' (Blatt, 2007: 5), which the narrator describes as 'un sueño re lindo' (Blatt, 2007: 5), is populated by stereotypical young masculine male characters; at the same time, the fact that there are no female characters in the story suggests that the *pibes* are not just in the majority but the only inhabitants of the narrator's vision.

In the context of this vision, the *pibes* can appear as anonymous inhabitants without further characterization, but they are generally singled out by one or two stereotypical masculine features that are explicitly eroticized or suggestively highlighted. In this frame, the 'tres pibes caminando por el medio de la calle' (Blatt, 2007: 5) that the narrator describes, exemplify the anonymous male habitants of the narrator's dreamlike sequence; while the 'varios pibes jugando a la pelota en un descampado' (Blatt, 2007: 5), 'un chico del interior andando en motito de delivery' (Blatt, 2007: 5), 'un pibe con buzo de Tigre andando en bici por la plaza de Lobos' (Blatt, 2007: 5), 'un chico en la cancha de Quilmes moviendo una bandera de palo de Argentinos' (Blatt, 2007: 6) and 'dos pibes hablando con los anteojos puestos' (Blatt, 2007: 7) illustrate the way in which the narrator singularizes the characters by highlighting one specific manly feature corresponding to the stereotypical habits of 'un pibe' (Blatt, 2007: 5). By incorporating the stereotypical habits of playing soccer, riding a motorcycle and '[ir a] la cancha' (Blatt, 2007: 6) into his vision of 'El Paraíso' (Blatt, 2007: 5), the narrator implicitly suggests that there is something appealing and/or erotic in those conventional habits. This erotic side of the

pibes' conventional habits becomes relatively more apparent when the narrator describes 'un chico en cuero' (Blatt, 2007: 5), 'la luz en el vestuario de chicos, los chicos' (Blatt, 2007: 5), 'un buen nadador' (Blatt, 2007: 5), 'un pibe extasiado mirándote de cerca a los ojos' (Blatt, 2007: 6), 'un pibe rubio de ojos negros haciendo juego consigo mismo' (Blatt, 2007: 6) and 'un chico haciéndote una pregunta interesante' (Blatt, 2007: 7). Finally, this erotic dimension is explicitly stated when the narrator introduces 'un chico re lindo bailando re bien' (Blatt, 2007: 5) and 'un chico re lindo de ver sin remera' (Blatt, 2007: 8).⁴⁰

This progression from suggested to explicit erotization of the stereotypical manly aspects of the *pibe* within the third part of the text, along with the detailed erotization of the masculine features of El Pibe de Oro during the second part of *Increíble*, contribute to the reader's grasp of the particular experience of the narrator's homoerotic desire within his own social environment. However, it is only by examining the narrator himself in relation to that environment that it is possible to understand the singularity of the narrator's viewpoint in comparison to other literary erotizations of stereotypical masculine men. As has been suggested, the narrator is also a *pibe*, which can be proved by the fact that, while he describes the habits of the other *pibes*, he is not simply watching the scene as an outsider but participating in that very scene that he is erotizing. Just like the other *pibes*, he wears a 'short de fútbol' (Blatt, 2007: 2) and 'un buzo de Ferro' (Blatt, 2007: 4), he is one of the players engaged in the game of *truco* and he is also taking part in the soccer game in which he describes the outstanding moves of El Pibe de Oro. In this context, the homosexual character who eroticizes masculine men is no longer 'el prototipo de lo mujeril' (Panesi, 1983: 903), as Jorge Panesi identifies in the case of Manuel Puig's character Molina in *El beso de la mujer araña* (1980); on the contrary, Blatt's narrator enacts the same stereotypical habits as the masculine man that he is attracted to. At the same time, and as this analysis will show by re-reading the second part of *Increíble*, it is not only the narrator who modifies the

⁴⁰ Through these extracts, there is no doubt that the narrator finds the *pibes* erotically attractive. Although extracts such as 'un pibe rubio de ojos negros haciendo juego consigo mismo' (Blatt, 2007: 6) might suggest that the narrator is attracted to *pibes*, phrases like 'un chico re lindo de ver sin remera' (Blatt, 2007: 8) allows for the reader to actually confirm his / her supposition regarding the narrator's sexuality during that part of the text.

meaning of the word *pibe* by preserving his manly habits whilst removing a demand for heterosexuality, but also El Pibe de Oro.

Although the previous analysis might suggest that El Pibe de Oro plays a passive role in the story, leaving the narrator with the freedom to imagine him as an object of desire, that is not exactly the case. On the contrary, there are several interactions between El Pibe de Oro and the narrator which not only shape the narrator's erotization of El Pibe de Oro, but also show the ambivalence of El Pibe de Oro in terms of his own sexual desire and orientation.

The first episode that thematizes El Pibe de Oro's sexual ambivalence is a scene in which the narrator suggests: 'Vayamos directo a la playa' and El Pibe de Oro 'en la orilla se saca el short y entra desnudo al mar pero dando[l]e la espalda' (Blatt, 2007: 2). In this scene, the fact that El Pibe de Oro has gone to the beach alone with the narrator, along with the fact that he decides to swim naked, might suggest that the sexual desire is reciprocal; however, the fact that he turns his back on the narrator -noticeably, to hide his penis- suggests otherwise. According to Moya Lloyd's reading of Judith Butler, this attitude of hiding from homosexuality and/or from 'the homosexual' (Lloyd, 2007: 90) is linked to the fact that the default normalization of heterosexuality is correlated with a pathologization of homosexuality that leads to 'homosexuality being feared' (Lloyd, 2007: 90). In the Argentinean context, this pathologization is rooted in the foundation of the country's ethical and educational system, according to which men were systematically instructed that 'la homosexualidad ... ponía en riesgo la construcción del sujeto argentino, que debía ser viril' (Aisenstein, Scharagrodsky, 2006: 122). Within this system, foundational literary texts such as Esteban Echeverría's *El Matadero*, have also sustained the mythology of a masculine national identity and have targeted homosexuality along with 'the man's loss of masculinity ... as a real threat' (Dececco, Girman, 2004: 1). From Osvaldo Bazán's perspective, this identification of the homosexual as a 'depravado o pervertido [y] ... una desviación de un sano estado normal de heterosexualidad' (Bazán, 2006: 305) prevailed during the dictatorship and the post-dictatorship era. As Juan Carlos Fernández -President of the Comunidad Homosexual de Entre Ríos (CHER)- recently pointed out, this prejudice still prevails in a contemporary context as,

‘a pesar de los avances [por] las leyes que avanzaron sobre los derechos igualitarios ... no todo está resuelto ... hasta la fecha seguimos siendo víctimas constantes de discriminación’ (Fernández, 2016: 1).

The contemporary prevalence of this prejudice is also illustrated in the story as the stereotypical *pibe* as portrayed by Blatt also replicates a condemnation of homosexual desires. This is evident in replies such as ‘¿qué me mirás con cara de birra?’ (Blatt, 2007: 4), where the characters of the story express a generalized defensive attitude towards the possibility of erotic looks or gestures being exchanged between one *pibe* and another. In this context, the mentioned ambivalent attitude of El Pibe de Oro, who swims naked but at the same time hides his sexualized body parts, can be generally understood within a tension between the pathologization of homosexuality corresponding to him being a *pibe* and his personal experience of being attracted to another man.

The ambivalent position that El Pibe de Oro embodies, which establishes a conflict between his desires and his prejudices, starts creating a tension between him and the narrator, whose attraction to El Pibe de Oro is established from the very moment the narrator creates the nickname for the character. This tension can be initially grasped in a scene that the narrator describes as follows: ‘Pasaste, yo te miré, no me miraste, me di cuenta de todo. Te dije ‘Pibe, ¿todo bien?’; me dijiste Sí’, eso fue todo’ (Blatt, 2007: 3). At first glance, this scene appears to lack conflict, as it seems to suggest that the desire of the narrator is plainly not shared by El Pibe de Oro; who does not reciprocate it. Nevertheless, the fact that the narrator insists on asking El Pibe de Oro if there is something else happening or something wrong, along with the fact that El Pibe de Oro’s answer is simply ‘sí’ when the narrator already knows -by the episode described in the prior paragraph- that El Pibe de Oro’s attitude towards the narrator is ambivalent, makes the simple answer sound unconvincing. The unrealistic nature of the certainty that El Pibe de Oro expresses verbally, can be also grasped in the episode that immediately follows the conversation quoted above; which is central to the understanding of the story’s conflict and to the inner conflict of its characters. During this episode, a highly sexualized conversation starts as a provocation between friends and ends up in a form of interaction in which the limits between friendly game and love are confused and almost dissolved:

Cebo mate ... y me quemo la mano. Le digo ai, me quemé la mano; con la pija, me dice. Me toqué la pija y me quemé la mano, le digo. Y para que se te enfríe te la metiste en el culo, me dice. No, para que se me enfríe te toqué el pecho y se me congeló, le digo. Qué me estás, diciendo pecho frío. Y no sé, vos fijate, le digo, mirándolo desde abajo con cara de Cachorro. Y el Pibe de Oro se me viene encima diciendo algo de ya vas a ver pechofrío y empezamos a jugar a la lucha hasta que todo se confunde con amor y a él me parece que no le gusta más (Blatt, 2007: 4).

Through this scene, not only is the roughly sexualized nature of the friendly slang between two *pibes* emphasised, but so too is the way in which that supposedly virile slang -in which the dynamics of accusing each other of homosexuality is normalized- occludes the complex and ambivalent desires that end up being expressed in a bodily way. In the case of El Pibe de Oro, the realization of the fact that his fight with the narrator has almost turned into a form of sexual contact, makes him interrupt the contact as such. Nevertheless, it is not stated that El Pibe de Oro does not enjoy that form of contact, but that 'parece que no le gusta' (Blatt, 2007: 4). In this context, it is only clear that El Pibe de Oro tries to appear like he does not have a reciprocal sexual desire towards the narrator, but it is not clarified that there is an absence of reciprocity. At the same time, the way in which El Pibe de Oro prevents himself from engaging in a form of loving interaction with the narrator is aligned with Lloyd's hypothesis on homosexuality being both 'feared and abjected' (Lloyd, 2007: 90). This particular abjection can be also understood in the context of what Sedgwick calls a fear of the 'potential unbrokenness of the continuum between homosocial and homosexual' (Segdwick, 1985: 699). According to this perspective, for a man to be friends with a man 'is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being 'interested in men'' (Segdwick, 1985:696); as Sedgwick explains, institutionalized practices such as sports 'seek constantly to disrupt [this always-already-crossed line] by separating the homosocial from the homosexual' (Segdwick, 1985: 697). In other

words, the homosocial bodily interaction between two men, while taking place in the frame of a conventional practice such as a sport, is not identified as homosexual as it would probably be if the same interaction were to happen outside the conventional context of sporting practice. Following this viewpoint, the scene of bodily contact between El Pibe de Oro and the narrator -as it occurs outside the frame of a conventional practice- highlights the lack of clarity around the limits between the homosocial and the homosexual and it does so by showing the ambivalent coexistence between El Pibe de Oro's homoerotic desire and his fear of being involved in a form of interaction that could be condemned by his peers as homosexual.

Nonetheless, this fear of being identified as homosexual does not prevent El Pibe de Oro from subtly showing his homoerotic desires. After the scene in which he interrupts his bodily interaction with the narrator, El Pibe de Oro approaches him again stating: '¿Flashaste que no volvía? ... Siempre flashás vos' (Blatt, 2007: 4);⁴¹ while touching the narrator's head 'haciendo[l]e escalofrío con la punta de los dedos en el remolino de la cabeza' (Blatt, 2007: 4). This spontaneous approach after a rather violent separation, accompanied by a touch that could be both interpreted as a friendly gesture and as a caress, increases the tension between him and the narrator and contributes to the suggestion that this tension is a result of El Pibe de Oro's inner ambivalence towards homosexuality. This ambivalence reaches its peak when, after initially hiding his naked body from the narrator, El Pibe de Oro explicitly invites the narrator to watch him 'hacer pis' (Blatt, 2007: 4) while calling the narrator 'Tigre' (Blatt, 2007: 4). As it is used in this scene, the term 'tigre' is highly ambiguous insofar as it can both refer to a friendly reminder, such as the one expressed in the English colloquial expression 'easy, tiger', but it can also refer to the sexual dimension attached to the savage animal.⁴² This ambiguity is again obvious when El Pibe de Oro tells the narrator that 'por cuarenta pesos [l]e dice que [l]o quiere' (Blatt, 2007: 5). In this particular reply, El Pibe de Oro relies on the fact that the narrator is attracted to him to make a supposedly virile and derogatory

⁴¹ The slang term 'flashear' means to imagine an alternative reality or to distort the actual reality by an imaginary operation.

⁴² 'Tigre' is also the name of a soccer team mentioned during the story, so the meaning of the term could be also charged with a specifically 'masculine' dimension related to 'competitive sports' (Connell, Messerschmidt, 2005: 833).

joke, but the fact that the joke is said in a context in which El Pibe de Oro has already shown physical attraction for the narrator suggests that there is truth and/or an occluded desire masked in El Pibe de Oro's humorous tone. From Sedgwick's perspective, the ambiguity found in all the prior episodes -whether they involve bodily contact or not- is once again proof of the blurriness of the line that supposedly divides the homosocial from the homosexual; a line that, although conventional practices such as sports try to draw clearly, is always and constitutively 'blurry' (Sedgwick, 1985: 697).

The fact that this line between the homosocial and the homosexual is porous also demands a critical review of the very concept of *pibe*, who has been historically defined as a young masculine heterosexual man. From Butler's perspective, the review of the meaning of the term *pibe* is granted by the term's 'contingent cultural constitution' (Butler, 1990: 153), which makes its meaning inherently unstable and capable of alluding to different referents attached to different standards across time. In the case of the word *pibe* as it is used in the context of *Increíble*, the narrator's and the characters' behaviours resignify the term in a way that retains some of its features -such as 'jugar al fútbol' (Blatt, 2007: 3), 'jugar al truco' (Blatt, 2007: 3) or 'tomar cerveza' (Blatt, 2007: 4)- while the standard of heterosexuality historically attached to it is discarded or called into question. At the same time, what is questioned through the characters' behaviours, which dismiss heterosexuality as a standard inherent in the concept of *pibe*, is the very possibility of fulfilling the ideal of heterosexuality as such. As Sedgwick has already pointed out, this ideal is a fiction resultant of not approaching sexual identity as part of a spectrum of social bonds.⁴³

However, if heterosexuality as such is an idealization impossible to fulfil, it is not only impossible to fulfil on the part of the characters in *Increíble*, but by all *pibes*, whether or not they define themselves or were historically defined by others as young, masculine and heterosexual. In this sense, what remains to be examined is why the meaning of the term *pibe* in relation to sexual identity

⁴³ In this frame, Blatt's critical position in relation to the historically prevalent meaning of the term *pibe* is similar to Uhart's standpoint in regard to the historically prevalent meaning of the word *señorita*. In both cases, what is being called into question is not only a particular ideal of femininity or masculinity, but the possibility of fulfilment of any ideal of sex/gendered identity as such.

started to be disputed at the time *Increíble* was published and was not discussed before. In this regard, the progressive political measures which included the legalization of same-sex civil unions and public debates focused on the legalization of same-sex marriage, can be of use to reframe Blatt's literature within its social context. Reasonably, the fact that a *pibe* can appear as a non-heterosexual figure within literature is related to the fact that the context in which that literature was published was one of cultural openness to new ways of social interaction and erotic desire. Thus, it is in this cultural frame that the shifts in the meaning of a term such as *pibe* -which played a central role 'in the construction of Argentinean masculinity' (Archetti, 2001: 155)- become possible.

At the same time, this cultural frame in which historically rigid categories can be debated, might help to understand why contemporary critics have not paid particular attention to gender and sexual normativities as key aspects in their analysis of Blatt's literature. In this context, the lack of attention paid to those themes sheds light upon a kind of reading which is not inclined to stigmatise or to reduce the richness of literature to the sexual choices of either the characters or the writers. Although that tendency is a marker of open-mindedness in literary criticism and theory -resistant to the norm of framing literature in rigid categories-; that very tendency can lead to a naïve form of analysis if special attention is not paid to certain categories and they are overlooked, even when they are critical to the understanding of a particular story. In the case of *Increíble*, the resistance towards the ideal of the *pibe* as a heterosexual figure and the construction of characters whose ambivalent sexual orientation defines the way in which they relate to each other, are not only central to this particular text but they are also significant to wider contemporary debates on literature, gender normativities and sexual identities.

Chapter 5: Las mellizas del bardo

Las mellizas del bardo by Hernán Vanoli was published in 2012, a date that marks the beginning of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's second term in office and a year that -in spite of being remembered as 'el año en que la Argentina tuvo los peores indicadores de la región' (Manzoni, 2013) and 'el año con el primer déficit fiscal desde 1996' (Canosa, 2013)- was far from 'los presagios apocalípticos' (Canosa, 2013) of a general economic crisis. This moderate disruption within the economic and the financial fields -which represented a discontinuity in relation to the prior period of economic stability-, was accompanied by continuity in terms of the government's approach to cultural and social matters.

In this sense, the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2010 was a continuation and a surpassing of the progressive political measures taken during the previous years; which included the legalization of same-sex civil union in many Argentinean provinces. At the same time, and as Paula Biglieri points out, measures such as the legalization of equal marriage put Argentina at the top of Latin American countries in terms of the progressiveness of its cultural policies; 'siendo el primer país de América Latina, y el décimo en el mundo en reconocer iguales derechos a todas las parejas y familias' (Biglieri, 2013: 146). In the editorial field, this favorable cultural panorama encouraged the opening of more 'editoriales pequeñas nacionales' (Szpilbarg, 2010: 2); creating 'un auge de editoriales independientes' (Sciancalepore, 2010: 1) that allowed the incorporation of a wider spectrum of marginalized voices into the literary scene.

Within this framework, *Las mellizas del bardo* has captivated both national and international critics with its 'campily cyberpunk style' (Caballero, 2012: 2), its 'pastiches that include crime pulp and knowledge of urban ethnography' (Caballero, 2012: 2) and 'un tono ... capaz de enhebrar imágenes

poderosas sin descanso, planeando sobre el humor y la exageración gozosa' (Ojeda, 2012). Nevertheless, these approaches have rarely delved into the fact that the assumption of a specific gendered identity, along with the relation between that gendered identity and a set of stereotypical behaviours attached to it, are central to Vanoli's story.⁴⁴ This centrality relies on the fact that Vanoli's *nouvelle* presents a futuristic scenario in which gender roles have been inverted in such a way that, during the time in which the story is set, women control and manage soccer team's *barrabravas*; while most men are pushed to enact the social roles of domestic servants and prostitutes.⁴⁵

In this context, Vanoli introduces his two main characters as 'minas' (Vanoli, 2012: 17) who are 'aspirantes a barrabravas del club Boca Juniors' (Ojeda, 2012).⁴⁶ Given the fact that these characters preserve their female identity while pursuing a historically male subject position, a study of which features of stereotypical femininity are preserved and which features of stereotypical masculinity are attached to them in the process is not only relevant but essential to the understanding of the story. At the same time, an in-depth analysis of the relation between the characters' gendered identities and the new standards attached to them within the text, can lead to a critical understanding of how and to what extent the meaning of the term *mina* is modified by Vanoli's futuristic setting.

⁴⁴ For a more detailed approach to the lack of attention paid to the role of sexuality and gendered identity in Hernán Vanoli's works, see 'Sobre *Las mellizas del bardo*' (Ojeda, 2012), 'Saint Lionel' (Caballero, 2015) and 'Cuando Puig se cruza con Arlt' (Crespi, 2013).

⁴⁵ About the relation between Vanoli's 'cyberpunk' (Caballero, 2012: 2) world and the inversion of gender roles which characterizes its social organization, it is worth noting that the reference to cyborg technology is only employed by Vanoli to emphasise the futuristic dimension of the story's setting; and, therefore, it does not affect the sexual nor the gendered identity of the characters. As the cybernetic component of Vanoli's futuristic era does not explore its potential to displace or make a paradigm shift in the sex/gender dichotomy, this analysis will not link that cybernetic dimension with relevant theoretical approaches that have related the figure of the cyborg with gender studies. In this sense, an analysis of *Las mellizas del bardo* in the light of works such as Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti's *Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine and Cyberspace* (1996) or Donna Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (1991) will not be carried out. In regards to the term *barrabrava*, it can be defined as 'organized and fanatical clubs of soccer hooligans' who, in Argentina, 'have been responsible for almost 300 real-life fatalities in the last century' (Caballero, 2012: 5).

⁴⁶ According to Nené Ramallo's etymological definition, the term *mina* 'significa mujer y proviene del italiano jergal mina, con ese valor' (Ramallo, 2012). Although the term has a long tradition which can be traced to the 18th century and is frequently used in tango songs written during the early decades of the twentieth century; *mina* is still common Argentinean slang for woman.

As stated, there is a series of stereotypical feminine features which the *minas* enact as they preserve their female identity. In fact, the story's first scene -which describes 'un brutal enfrentamiento' (Zamorano, 2012) after the two main characters fail to infiltrate San Lorenzo's *barrabrava*- is one of the most densely charged with typical feminine features. Firstly, the clothes that the main characters are wearing -which include 'calzas negras *dry fit* compradas sin probar en el Parque Centenario' (Vanoli, 2012: 9), 'tanguitas de algodón gastado' (Vanoli, 2012: 9) and 'musculosa' (Vanoli, 2012: 10)-, are typical of a feminine woman of the Argentinean lower-middle class; specifically, of the group of female 'hinchas' or 'mujeres [que] están en las canchas' (Conde, 2008: 125).⁴⁷ As female *hinchas*, the clothes that San Lorenzo's *barrabravas* are wearing are also illustrative of their social position and their feminine identity; during this scene, their outfit includes 'shorts de jean' (Vanoli, 2012:12) and 'polleras batik' (Vanoli, 2012: 12). As Laura Zambrini points out, 'faldas cortas, ropa ajustada, maquillajes, etc ... se han transformado en íconos de la seducción femenina' (Zambrini, 2007: 9), inasmuch as they are typically worn with the belief that they satisfy 'las expectativas sociales respecto de la condición femenina orquestada desde un mandato patriarcal dominante' (Zambrini, 2007: 9) and 'las nociones de belleza que surgen de los estereotipos construidos socialmente respecto de 'lo femenino'' (Zambrini, 2007: 8).⁴⁸ Another indicator of stereotypical femininity is the fact that both the main characters and their rivals are wearing make-up; while Vicky -one of the two protagonists- is wearing 'rouge ... bordó' (Vanoli, 2012: 9), San Lorenzo's *barrabravas* are described as 'todas bastante producidas ... con sombra negra encima de los ojos' (Vanoli, 2012:12). According to Kenneth Plummer, a typical feminine role includes 'a woman's interest in make-up' (Plummer, 2002:282) as it highlights that she is trying to 'make the best of herself' (Plummer, 2002: 282); at the same time, if a

⁴⁷ Parque Centenario has a famous fair selling used and second-hand clothes; in this particular description, having bought a calza in Parque Centenario indicates that the character belongs to the low or lower-middle class. As will be demonstrated by later descriptions, wearing second-hand clothing is a feature typical to this character.

⁴⁸ This interest in looking attractive to the opposite sex is also emphasised in a short episode involving secondary female characters, in which it is said that they 'tienen amputada la teta derecha' (Vanoli, 2012: 32); which 'no ... resulta sexy' (Vanoli, 2012: 32) when trying to seduce men.

man decides to wear make-up on a daily basis, that decision is considered as ‘feminizing’ or ‘femaling’ (Plummer, 2002: 288) himself. The third aspect that is shown as stereotypically feminine within the story’s first scene is the *minas*’ perfume choices; as the story explicitly recounts, Naty -the narrator and one of the two protagonists- is wearing ‘un perfume imitación del *J’Adore* de Dior’ (Vanoli, 2012: 9), while San Lorenzo’s *barrabravas* are using ‘kilos de *Angel Face*’ (Vanoli, 2012: 12). Although perfume can be worn by both men and women, ‘perfume names ... are chosen according to methodological purposes ... oriented to draw messages on themes such as femininity’ (Freitas, Tuna, 2012: 103). Following Sandra Tuna and Elisa Freitas’ analysis of ‘female and male images in contemporary perfume ads’ (Freitas, Tuna, 2012: 95), it can be asserted that product names and ‘other verbal and visual elements’ (Freitas, Tuna, 2012: 96) can be used to increase or to avoid ‘feminine connotations’ (Freitas, Tuna, 2012: 104). In the case of *Las mellizas del bardo*, *J’Adore*’s ad campaign -which includes the stereotypically feminine figure of Charlize Theron- and *Angel Face*’s name -which is invented by Vanoli for this scene- are mentioned to hyperbolically highlight that the *minas* still wear stereotypically feminine products while enacting their manly role as hooligans.

A similar focus is observable when the characters’ habits are described. During a reunion of Boca Juniors’ *barrabravas*, the narrator states that ‘[le] haría falta un cóctel de vodka con ibu-evanol’ (Vanoli, 2012: 27). In this statement, two stereotypical feminine features are emphasised: firstly, the choice of ‘un cóctel de vodka’ (Vanoli, 2012: 27). As Auyero, Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes state, stereotypical men usually try to consume drinks such as whisky which are associated with ‘machos, alpha-males, or economic status’ (Auyero, Bourgois, Scheper-Hughes, 2015: 116), while cocktails are perceived as a marker of femininity.⁴⁹ The second marker of femininity in the narrator’s

⁴⁹ According to Cele Otnes’ and Linda Tuncay-Zayer’s analysis in *Gender, Culture, and Consumer Behavior* (2012), the mass media often depict stereotypical feminine women ‘drinking lattes in cafes and cocktails in hotel bars’ (Otnes, Tuncay-Zayer, 2012:69). Although this stereotype of femininity seems to stem from the allegedly independent ‘affluent young women of ... Sex and the City’ (Otnes, Tuncay-Zayer, 2012: 69), this very stereotype that used to characterise a wealthy minority ‘has firmly left its mark emblazoned on popular culture, not least since it foregrounds consumption as a way of expressing gender’

statement is the inclusion of Ibuevanol; as its brand's advertisement indicates, this is a product specifically developed for intense menstrual pains or simply for 'la mujer que menstrúa' (Rojas, 2014). Moreover, besides being a product specially developed for women, Ibuevanol is well-known for its 'comercial ... sexista y discriminatorio' (Rojas, 2014) which 'lo que hace ... es reforzar el estereotipo [y] la vergüenza que [la mujer] debía tener por la menstruación' (Rojas, 2014). With this in mind, it is clear that the mixture of Ibuevanol and 'un cóctel de vodka' (Vanoli, 2012: 27) highlights two stereotypically feminine features in one gesture. A similar conjunction of two feminine features is made when the narrator states: 'Ayer invertí en depilación ... duele pero te purifica' (Vanoli, 2012: 9). Within this statement, two aspects on which femininity conventionally relies are evoked. Firstly, the statement illustrates the cost and the amount of pain involved in the process of female grooming; as Sheila Jeffreys states, there is a 'searing pain' (Jeffreys, 2014: 134) in many naturalized feminine customs. The other stereotypically feminine habit contained within the narrator's statement is the custom of waxing herself; as Merran Toerien, Sue Wilkinson and Precilla Y. L. Choi point out, 'body hair removal' (Toerien, Wilkinson, Choi, 2005: 399) is directly correlated to 'the production of normative femininity' (Toerien, Wilkinson, Choi, 2005: 399). In this sense, it is clear that 'depilarse' (Vanoli, 2012: 9) is still a practice widely identified as feminine. Another stereotypical feminine practice is mentioned when La Gorda -one of the two leaders of Boca Juniors' *barrabrava*- 'se lima las uñas' (Vanoli, 2012: 27); as Sue Scott and David Morgan underline, filing one's nails, as well as 'using make up and nail polish' (Morgan, Scott, 2004: 65), are considered 'traditional markers of the feminine' (Morgan, Scott, 2004: 65). Another predominantly feminine practice is shown when La Torda -the other leader of Boca Juniors' *barrabrava*- is seen 'fumando otro Virginia' (Vanoli, 2012: 31). Just as the name and brand of perfumes were used to highlight features of the character's physical appearance, the name and the brand of cigarettes are

(Otnes, Tuncan-Zayer, 2012: 69). In the particular case of Vanoli's story, the reference to 'un cóctel de vodka' (Vanoli, 2012: 27) can be understood as a popular (and satirical) appropriation of a consumption pattern that was previously reserved to women of the upper class.

employed to highlight how feminine habits are preserved even by the *minas* of the largest Argentinean *barrabrava*. In this case, the name Virginia stands for Virginia Slims which, as Benjamin Toll suggests, was always targeted as a ‘female brand’ (Toll, 2005: 172); according to his study, the clients that the brand tried to attract from the beginning ‘were women who could make choices but had not lost their femininity’ (Toll, 2015: 172). In this sense, the woman targeted by the brand coincides realistically with the portrayal of the leader of the *barrabravas* who tries to preserve her femininity while enacting a historically male subject role.

Finally, the last three stereotypically feminine aspects that the main characters preserve while enacting their manly roles are heterosexuality, jealousy and a craving for a long-term committed relationship. The first aspect is mostly illustrated by the two main romantic bonds which are described during the story. The first romantic relationship involves Vicky and Lucio, a ‘pibe’ (Vanoli, 2012: 34) that the characters meet in ‘el quilombo cerca de la laguna de Chascomús’ (Vanoli, 2012: 31), where La Torda decides to make a stop in the middle of a road trip that would ultimately lead the three to ‘alquilar el cyborg de Lionel Messi a un grupo de futbolísticas brasileras’ (Ojeda, 2012).⁵⁰ As described by the narrator, Lucio looks ‘muy parecido a Luis’ (Vanoli, 2012: 34), Vicky’s former and only boyfriend who has passed away. Although their similarities may suggest a sinister fetish, it is particularly relevant for this analysis as it implies that Vicky has always been heterosexual. The other presumably romantic -or embryonically romantic- bond is the one established between the cyborg Lionel Messi and the narrator. Although the first attraction that the narrator shows towards the cyborg Messi occurs during the road trip, as the narrator focuses on ‘mirar la cara de paz de Lionel mientras duerme’ (Vanoli, 2012: 47); the bond becomes stronger as ‘Naty termina convertida en un cyborg similar a Messi y parte en busca de su destino ... hasta que el cyborg [de Lionel]

⁵⁰ In this context, the term ‘quilombo’ is employed as a synonym of brothel which, in the inverted world of Vanoli’s story, is populated by male prostitutes which –as will be studied later– are derogatorily referred to as ‘chongos’ (Vanoli, 2012: 35). Nevertheless, Lucio is an exceptional male character in the story as, instead of being a prostitute or a servant, he is presented as an outlaw.

vuelve a cruzarse en su camino' (Ojeda, 2012). Apart from being reinforced by this bond, Naty's heterosexuality is evidenced by the fact that, before developing a bond with Messi, she is also physically attracted to Lucio when the characters first meet each other; describing him as 'hermoso' (Vanoli, 2012: 34).

The fact that Vicky notices Naty's initial attraction towards Lucio also emerges later in the story, in a fight which evidences both a seemingly jealous attitude coming from the narrator and Vicky's expectations of building a romantic long-term bond. During this fight, in which the narrator presents her doubts about Lucio's reliability just as he is about to join them in their quest, Vicky replies: '¿Estás celosa?, ¿tan egoísta sos? ... Te gusta desde el primer momento en que lo viste' (Vanoli, 2012: 55). As Andaç Demirtas and Ali Donmez point out, it is often thought that there is 'a positive relationship between femininity and jealousy' (Demirtas, Donmez, 2006: 2); at the same time, this jealousy attributed to women is often accompanied by the idea that female are stereotypically 'more storgic (friendship oriented) ... and manic (possessive) in their love attitudes than male' (Bailey, Hendrick, 1987: 638). In the frame of Vanoli's story, this stereotypical possessive attitude can be traced in the dialogue quoted above as Vicky claims that Naty wants the man Vicky has (while Vicky wants to keep the man she has gained). Both features, which refer to the allegedly unreasonable side of womanhood, are representative of a stigmatization according to which women's emotions are considered hysterical; even though it has been proved that 'hysteria [is] not an exclusively female disease' (Tasca, Rapetti, Giovanni Carta, Fadda, 2012: 74). In Kathryn Woodward's terms, this stigma implies that women are often 'associated with nature rather than culture and with «the heart» and the emotions rather than «the head» and rationality' (Woodward, 1997: 37).

After the stereotypically feminine features of possessiveness and jealousy have been attributed to the *minas*, the conversation continues as Vicky adds: '¿Querés que yo esté sola toda la vida como vos?' (Vanoli, 2012: 55). This particular reply sheds light on the desire of the character to build what John

Marshall Townsend calls ‘a long-term emotional relationship’ (Townsend, 1999: 159), which he associates with a feminine woman typified as ‘would be-wife’ (Townsend, 1999: 159); even if that woman ‘denies this is her goal’ (Townsend, 1998: 159). In the case of Vicky, the conversation suggests that she has the desire of finding someone to spend her life with, even though she would never be able to admit that while being a member of Boca Juniors’ *barrabrava*.⁵¹

Although the feminine features that the characters preserve are numerous, there are also a considerable number of stereotypically masculine traits that are attached to the characters as they embody a historically male subject position. Firstly, a lot of the stereotypical feminine features mentioned above are accompanied by a stereotypical masculine aspect that serves to counteract any hint of a prevalence of femininity. In this sense, when the narrator states that she has invested ‘en depilación’ (Vanoli, 2012: 9); that statement is immediately followed by a specification according to which she has used ‘cera negra’ (Vanoli, 2012: 9). As Leigh Broadhurst explains, regular wax -made by a combination of ‘slum gum, propolis and honey’ (Broadhurst, 2005: 15)- is commonly known as ‘white wax’ (Broadhurst, 2005: 15); whereas cera negra is a specific literary invention the only purpose of which is to masculinize in opposition to a rather feminine feature. A similar move is made when it is said that La Gorda ‘se lima las uñas’ (Vanoli, 2012: 27), which is accompanied by the statement: ‘Pero [las uñas] son tan gruesas que lo único que consigue es afilarlas’ (Vanoli, 2012: 27). As Sherry Velasco argues, ‘animalization’ (Velasco, 2005: 70) is a way of constructing the image of ‘the masculine woman’ (Velasco, 2005: 70); which is opposed to the image of the feminine woman as defined by the stereotypical features of ‘normative femininity’ (Toerien, Wilkinson, Choi, 2005: 399). The same gesture of masculinization occurs when Vicky’s clothes are described; after the fact that she wears ‘una musculosa’ (Vanoli, 2012:10) is given, the

⁵¹ As she enacts a male subject position, she might be encouraged or coerced to behave according to the standard which states that men must ‘repress and compartmentalise emotions’ (Duncombe, Marsden, 1993: 232). At the same time, she could be denying her willingness to start a long-term relationship because, according to the same standard, stereotypical ‘men are often genuinely unaware of their feelings’ (Levant, 1990: 309).

additional information that 'nunca usa corpiño' (Vanoli, 2012: 10) is added, as is the description that 'la aureola [de transpiración] que empieza en la axila llega hasta la cintura ... porque no hay desodorante que la aguante' (Vanoli, 2012: 10). As Judith McGaw points out, the generalised use of the brassiere as 'feminine technology' (McGaw, 2003: 13) can be seen as a result of the prevalence of certain 'definitions of feminine beauty' (McGaw, 2003: 18); inasmuch as feminists who were opposed to those definitions of femininity 'were often dismissed as «bra burners»' (McGaw, 2003: 18). Therefore, the fact that Vicky does not wear a bra and wears 'una musculosa' (Vanoli, 2012: 10) operates as a way of minimizing the femininity of her appearance. The fact that the narrator highlights Vicky's hyperbolic sweat and body odour is also a marker of stereotypical masculinity added to an initially feminine appearance; as Fox, Löfstedt, Woodward, Eriksson and Werkstrom suggest, it has been found that 'women reduce their metabolism on heat exposure and thus sweat less readily and freely than men' (Eriksson, Fox, Löfstedt, Werkstrom, Woodward, 1969: 444). Another episode in which the *minas'* physical appearances are masculinized occurs when -after stating that San Lorenzo's *barrabravas* look feminine as they wear skirts and short shorts- it is further revealed that one of them known as 'la colorada' (Vanoli, 2012: 11) has 'media fila de dientes de cada lado' (Vanoli, 2012: 11). As Zaida Salazar Mora points out in her analysis of 'imagen corporal femenina y publicidad' (Mora, 2007: 71), 'la estética y salud bucodental' (Mora, 2007: 77) is considered an integral part of the feminine 'estándar de belleza ideal' (Mora, 2007: 77); so the lack of dental care can be seen as a marker of masculinity that counterbalances the prevalence of a feminine appearance.

The masculinization of the female characters is also evidenced by attributing to them a number of habits traditionally thought of as manly. First of all, the food that the characters consume and the way in which they consume it are intended to be emphatically masculine. In this sense, the second scene of the story displays *minas* eating 'asado' (Vanoli, 2012: 17) which, as Jeffrey Pilcher explains, 'is often exclusive in its gendering as a masculine phenomenon'

(Pilcher, 2012). At the same time, the fact that La Gorda accompanies the asado with ‘una berenjena ... [de la que] corta un pedazo y se lo come sin haber terminado de masticar lo de antes’ (Vanoli, 2012: 17) emphasises her eating habits, which are opposed to the rigid table manners that Margaret Visser defines as ‘the rules of table etiquette’ (Visser, 1991: 48).⁵² This lack of ‘table etiquette’ (Visser, 2015: 48) is also illustrated by a subsequent scene in which the *barrabravas* are shown eating ‘papas fritas bañadas en ketchup y mostaza ... [mientras] se limpian la boca con las muñecas’ (Vanoli, 2012: 69). A similar scenario shows a group of *minas* drinking ‘cartones de tetra’ (Vanoli, 2012: 59), ‘cerveza en vasos de cartón’ (Vanoli, 2012: 68) and ‘fernet de una botella cortada a la mitad’ (Vanoli, 2012: 11). Apart from being an indicator of the characters’ belonging to a low or low-middle class –‘tetra brick’ is among the cheapest local wines with its ‘cheap look of plastic bottles’ (Goode, Harrop, 2011:227), while Fernet is a highly popular drink–; these quotes also refer to the ways in which those beverages are drunk, which are identified with vulgar or rudimentary manners as opposed to the rigid behaviours previously identified by Visser as stereotypically feminine (it is worth noting that the drinks are consumed in receptacles made of cardboard and cut bottles). In addition, the fact that tetra brick is called by its colloquial abbreviation tetra, suggests that the *minas* consume it regularly and use the popular term used by masculine subjects. This conjunction between a specific type of food and the language that is employed to refer to it can be also grasped when the characters are shown eating ‘sanguches’ (Vanoli, 2012: 52); although sandwiches are not an exclusively manly meal, the way in which it is spelled is typically identified with a rather vulgar or colloquial language. From Michael Antony’s perspective, ‘masculinity among the working classes’ (Antony, 2009: 35) is often associated with ‘an assertion of crass, vulgar speech’ (Antony, 2009: 35) as a form of ‘self-inflected cultural and intellectual privation’ (Antony, 2009: 35) and as ‘a reverse class snobbery’ (Antony, 2009: 35); under this light, the fact that the female

⁵² According to Visser, traditionally ‘at the table ... girls would be schooled in decorative feminine movements’ (Visser, 1991: 48); this kind of movements—which are associated with a traditional notion of femininity—, can be seen as opposed to the caricatured eating habits attributed to Vanoli’s characters.

barrabravas markedly pronounce ‘sanguches’ (Vanoli, 2012: 52) in a way that is identified as vulgar can be understood as a strategy towards sounding specifically masculine.

This ubiquitous use of vulgar and/or colloquial language and its employment as a marker of masculinity are also intertwined with the description of other characters’ habits, one of which is the use of prostitutes. During the episode mentioned previously in which La Torda decides to stop in ‘un quilombo’ (Vanoli, 2012: 31), she presents the place by saying that ‘donde vamos hay machitos a cagar’ (Vanoli, 2012: 30).⁵³ Later on, the place is described as a disco ‘con dos o tres rings de pelea en el barro entre chongos’ (Vanoli, 2012: 30); as John Mastandrea poses, competitions such as ‘wet T-shirt contests’ (Mastandrea, 2001: 48) -which typically involve all-female contestants and all-male spectators- have been repeatedly denounced as ‘boorish and sexist’ (Mastandrea, 2001: 48). In Vanoli’s world in which gender roles have been relatively inverted, the same sexist games are practiced with female-watchers and male-contestants, who are vulgarly and derogatorily called ‘machitos’ (Vanoli, 2012: 30) or ‘chongos’ (Vanoli, 2012: 30).⁵⁴ Besides being turned into objects of desire, the *chongos* are also identified as male prostitutes as they are ‘pibes de pueblo que vinieron a ver si alguien se los levanta’ (Vanoli, 2012: 31); in this context, the expression ‘levantar’ or ‘ser levantado’ refers to the act through which a client picks up or selects a prostitute in order to request her/his services. With the purpose of ‘levantarse un chongo’, La Torda approaches one of ‘los pibes’ (Vanoli, 2012: 31) and asks him: ‘¿Cuánto cobrás?’ (Vanoli, 2012: 38); which is the typical formula according to which an Argentinean male would ‘levantar’ (Vanoli, 2012: 31) a female prostitute. The morning after, La Torda explicitly celebrates ‘los chongos que se cepillaron’ (Vanoli, 2012: 39) and describes ‘su chongo’ (Vanoli, 2012: 39) as ‘muy gauchito’ (Vanoli, 2012: 39).⁵⁵ This latter

⁵³ ‘A cagar’ (Vanoli, 2012: 30) is a vulgar idiomatic expression which means ‘in bulk’.

⁵⁴ The abbreviation ‘machitos’ is charged with a derogatory meaning which implies that the ‘minas’ have turned the former ‘machos’ into inferior or objectifiable subjects.

⁵⁵ The expression ‘cepillarse a’ means ‘to have sex with’; the term is derogatory insofar as the one who is being ‘cepillado’ supposedly assumes a passive role during the sexual interaction, while the one who ‘cepilla’ performs a dominant role.

expression, as charged with a sexual connotation, is often conjugated in the feminine gender in order to describe a woman who is willing to devote herself to ‘la satisfacción unívoca del placer sexual masculino’ (Golay, 2013: 15).⁵⁶ As Vanoli’s futuristic scenario presents an alleged reversal of roles, the term is conjugated in its masculine grammatical gender to refer to a man devoted to satisfy a woman’s pleasures.⁵⁷

Although this scene resembles those involving the consumption of food insofar as it is another example of appropriation of a former masculine language in order to refer to a former masculine practice, there is a qualitative difference between the two episodes. This difference relies on the fact that, while the appropriation of alimentary habits and a specific language attached to them has no ethical implications, the appropriation of customs such as subject objectification and engagement in prostitution -along with the derogatory expressions attached to them- calls into question the conditions in which women are allowed to dominate Vanoli’s alternative world. Even though this structure can be sufficiently grasped by looking at the episodes described above, there is an additional factor that completes the setting and in which the dominant foundations and the prevalent perspective that sustain Vanoli’s futuristic world

⁵⁶ Although in this context the word *gauchito* does not refer to the historical figure of the ‘gaucho’, the expression ‘*ser gaucho*’ is widely employed in non-sexual contexts to refer to someone who is willing to ‘*hacer un favor*’ (Salas, 2010: 3). Thus, both the colloquial expression ‘*ser gaucho*’ and the sexually charged expression ‘*ser gauchito*’ derive from a representation of the *gaucho* that pictures him as someone who is ‘*atento y servicial*’ (Salas, 2010: 3).

⁵⁷ It should be noted that there are close similarities between the stereotypical masculine features attributed to the female characters of Vanoli’s text and the stereotypical masculine features attributed to the *pibes* within *Increíble*; and there are also parallels between the stereotypical feminine features attributed to Vanoli’s characters and the ones attached to the feminine characters in *Señorita* and/or ‘*La larga risa de todos esos años*’. Just as was the case with Blatt’s *pibes*, Vanoli’s female characters are soccer fans who wear sports clothing, drink popular alcohol beverages such as beer, use colloquial or vulgar language in order to emphasise their toughness, do not care about their dental health and behave at the table with disregard for any set of rigid table manners or ‘table etiquette’ (Visser, 1991: 48). The lack of etiquette of Vanoli’s female characters, understood as a marker of stereotypical masculinity pertinent to the working-class to which those characters belong, can be seen as opposed to the stereotypically feminine behaviour encouraged by some of Uhart’s female characters, who sustain that a *señorita* should behave according to a sense of moderation and self-restraint. Moreover, *Las mellizas del bardo*’s female characters differ from the *señoritas* not only when they behave according to stereotypical ideals of masculinity, but also when stereotypical feminine features are attributed to them. In this frame, the feminine features attached to Vanoli’s characters are closer to the model of stereotypical femininity depicted within Fogwill’s story –according to which feminine women such as Franca are hysterical and unreasonable–, than to the model of femininity characterised in Uhart’s text, in which a stereotypical woman is supposed to behave prudently and moderately.

are evident. That factor is the narrator's homoerotic attraction towards Vicky and the standpoint from which this attraction is portrayed during the text.

Within the story, there are several episodes in which the narrator expresses a subtle erotic attraction towards her peer. This attraction can be glimpsed in the opening paragraphs, when the arrival of the San Lorenzo bus surprises Vicky and the narrator states: 'Cuando se sorprende Vicky es hermosa' (Vanoli, 2012: 11). This statement is immediately followed by an affirmation according to which 'todos se deleitan con el color de la piel de Vicky' (Vanoli, 2012: 11) and 'la Vicky calienta a todo el mundo' (Vanoli, 2012: 11). The following scenes also include descriptions in which the narrator describes herself 'quedándose mirando las pestañas de Vicky' (Vanoli, 2012: 33) or 'el pelo de Vicky ... ese pelo de faraona' (Vanoli, 2012: 25). The narrator's erotic attraction increases when she grabs her perfume, 'le tir[a] un poco [a Vicky] en el cuello' (Vanoli, 2012: 33) and watches while her companion 'se estremece y se derrama ... *J'Adore* con las muñecas' (Vanoli, 2012: 25). Finally, this attraction is shown at its peak when the narrator explicitly admits: 'No puedo resistirme a la mirada de Vicky' (Vanoli, 2012: 56). Although this homoerotic desire could be fairly interpreted as an instance of the 'continuum of homosocial bonds' (Sedgwick, 1985: 694) described by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, according to which the line between the homosocial and the homosexual is always blurry, this is not the position adopted within the narrative. On the contrary, Vanoli's text pictures this homoerotic desire as a temporary deviation, as a superficial reaction always contaminated by an allegedly feminine sentiment of envy and/or as part of a stereotypically masculine fantasy. The first interpretation is supported by the fact that the momentary homoerotic tension between Naty and Vicky is at the end completely displaced by their relationships with the male characters; namely, Lucio and Messi's cyborg. The second interpretation is sustained by the fact that, in the majority of cases, the statements that highlight Vicky's appeal are accompanied by comments in which Naty adds that 'le pone celosa que todo le quede tan bien [a Vicky]' (Vanoli, 2012: 11). By accompanying Naty's compliments with a sentiment of 'celos' (Vanoli, 2012: 11),

those comments appear less as a manifestation of an erotic desire than as a fixation that the narrator has upon Vicky because 'la envidia' (Vanoli, 2012:11). In other words, the homoerotic desire that Naty shows towards Vicky -as it is mixed with a sense of envy- ends up being reduced by the story to a form of 'feminine jealousy' (Moi, 1982: 60). The third interpretation -according to which these episodes of homoerotic attraction are seen through the lens of a masculine fantasy-, can be explained by the idea that stereotypical masculine men enjoy lesbian interactions as long as they are displayed within 'the sexploitation model of lesbian-themed films' (Butler, 2004: 169). As this model depicts erotic interaction between women as a naïve simulation and not as an embracement of a homosexual identity between same-sex lovers, it intends to separate the playful homosocial bond from the homosexual bond; which -in the case of the lovers becoming lesbians- would leave the men outside the game. In Vanoli's story, the playful homoerotic tension between the characters coincides with this kind of fantasy, according to which attraction and contact between *minas* is permitted only until the point in which the story is about to turn the homosocial into the homosexual. In this sense, *Las mellizas del bardo* preserves the main characters' normative heterosexuality both by not allowing the sexual interaction between them and by showing that each of them ends up with a male partner.

When re-reading all the analyzed episodes through this normative point of view, the foundation on which Vanoli's futuristic scenario relies becomes clearer. Firstly, the gesture of inversion through which the story attributes women's stereotypical submissive gender roles to men does not modify the features of each stereotype but instead preserves the sex/gender dichotomous structure on which those stereotypes depend. Moreover, this binary structure composed of two stereotypes is not only evident in the distribution of gender roles, but also in the construction of the characters' identities. As the gendered identities of the main characters are composed of stereotypical feminine features and the addition of stereotypical masculine features coming from the male subject position that they enact; both stereotypes are preserved insofar as they can be

clearly separated from one another. In other words, the characters' identities are built on the sum of two stereotypes and not on a juxtaposition or melting of features that can no longer be identified as stereotypically masculine or feminine. Finally, and as the analysis of the narrator's homoerotic desire has illustrated, the preservation of a prevalent dichotomous structure is also present in regard to the characters' sexual identity, as the story insists on drawing a clear line between the homosocial and the homosexual which upholds the idea of the dichotomy over the notion of a spectrum.

However, the acceptance of the composition of the *minas*' sexual and gendered identities as a sum of features coming from two stereotypes based on a binary gender/sex structure does not explain the criteria that decides which stereotypically feminine features need to be preserved and which need to be replaced by stereotypical masculine features. In this context, the lens through which the narrator's homoerotic desire towards Vicky is built sheds light on that missing criteria. In other words, the perspective through which the narrator's homoerotic desire is seen -which supposes that the desire is transitory and non-conclusive in regard to the characters' sexual identity- implies that the *minas* are still heterosexual, which is then confirmed by the bonds the main characters establish with Lucio and Messi. This means that one of the features that the *minas* have not inherited from men is their stereotypical masculine sexual identity; as, if the *minas* were to have inherited a default male sexual identity, they would be attracted to women instead of men. In this sense, the only reason why men have been granted a future in Vanoli's advanced society in which robots and cyborgs have already taken the place of intelligent people is because women have kept their default female heterosexuality and, therefore, they are still attracted to and fall in love with men.⁵⁸ Although the preservation of female heterosexuality and therefore, the preservation of men, might seem random or

⁵⁸ As has already been mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the figure of the cyborg appears in the text to specifically emphasise that the story is set in a distant future. In this sense, the cybernetic component is shown not only as a feature attached to main characters such as Messi, but also to secondary characters such as the bus driver shown during the story's first scene; as it is explicitly said: 'el ... que maneja' (Vanoli, 2012: 11) the bus in which Naty and Vicky start a fight with San Lorenzo's *barrabravas* is a 'cyborg' (Vanoli, 2012: 11).

as unjustified as the preservation as any other feminine feature, this ceases to seem aleatory as soon as it is linked with the ways in which the homoerotic desire of the characters is portrayed; that is to say, a perspective that displays a female homoerotic bond according to the standards of a stereotypical masculine fantasy. In this sense, not only are the *minas* still being objectified by the eye of an implicit male watcher that wants to see them naively (though erotically) interacting with each other; but they are also refrained from acting upon their homoerotic attraction as the structure that supports and is supported by Vanoli's setting needs to be not only dichotomic, but also heteronormative.

This heteronormative foundation has two significant implications. Firstly, it completely contradicts the story's verisimilitude according to which men have been subjugated by women, as the maintenance of reciprocal heterosexual relationships depends on the fact that the men involved are somehow left outside the logic of subjugation (at the final stage of the story, both male candidates represent an exception to the system: Messi is a fugitive cyborg and Lucio remains an outlaw).⁵⁹ Secondly, it contradicts what certain critics have claimed to be the disobedient or disruptive factor of the story; that is, the display of 'reivindicaciones feministas' (Zamorano, 2012) by the construction of a world 'dominado por mujeres' (Zamorano, 2012).⁶⁰ At the same time, the lack of consistency of this kind of reading might explain why the positive reviews of the story -such as the ones quoted in the introduction of this chapter- have not been focused on the presuppositions it makes about gender and sexual identities, but on the fact that *Las mellizas del bardo* 'es una novela ágil y entretenida, delirante' (Ojeda, 2012).

⁵⁹ As Messi's cyborg is liberated from the hands of La Gorda y La Torda, who tried to sell him to Brazilian *barrabravas* using Naty and Vicky as mediators, it is suggested that he becomes a fugitive that commands 'una banda de piratas del asfalto que está haciendo boquetes y robando transportadores de nafta humana' (Vanoli, 2012: 79).

⁶⁰ As positions such as the ones posited by Judith Butler and Rosi Braidotti prove, among many others, it is highly doubtful that contemporary feminists' visions of the future resemble a world in which both subjugation and a dichotomous structure that divides men from women and the masculine from the feminine remain.

Finally, the dichotomous heteronormative foundation that supports the story sheds light on how and to what extent the term *mina* has or could have been modified by Vanoli's setting. As Vanoli decided to locate the story in a future in which logical connection with the present is unexplained, the possibilities of releasing gendered terms such as *mina* from their historical restraints were unlimited. In this context, the meaning of the term *mina* was not only constitutively subject to change because of its 'contingent cultural constitution' (Butler, 1990: 153), but it was also particularly opened to change as a future which did not need to be realistically tied to the present could have presented a complete disruptive utopia free from sex/gender normativities. Instead, Vanoli chooses to preserve the term *mina* within a normative structure which changes its meaning mostly in a negative way, as the main feature that a *mina* inherits from stereotypical masculinity is the exercise of dominance. At the same time, the fact that critics such as Zamorano identify that exercise of dominance with women's complete emancipation, does not take into account that the power given to women is not absolute but restricted by the fact that they keep depending on men both romantically and sexually. Although the narrative techniques through which the story is told might seem striking or disruptive to some readers, those superficial effects fail to hide the fact that the exchange in gender roles does not represent a complete inversion in favour of female dominance and, most importantly, it does not displace the dichotomous structure on which the very distinction between femininity and masculinity relies.

Chapter 6: Tarde de amigas

‘Tarde de amigas’ by Mauro Moschini was published in 2013, a date that marks the mid-point of the second presidency of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and a year in which several major disputes erupted; including the ones regarding ‘la reforma judicial’ (Binder, 2008: 48), the contradictory versions of the country’s economic growth and inflationary indexes and the incorporation of allegedly controversial figures into the political arena. In this context, the scenario became acutely polarized, emphasising a confrontation between ‘el kirchnerismo’ (Della Rocca, 2013: 101) -which tended to hold on to the cultural and social progressiveness of the government- and ‘la oposición’ (Della Rocca, 2013: 84), which tried to highlight the government’s economic flaws while dismissing the impact of its social achievements.⁶¹

However, this confrontational setting did not significantly affect the expansion of the independent editorial field, which continued to experience a period of ‘auge’ (Vanoli, 2010: 130) and kept incorporating marginalized voices by creating new modalities of publication and circulation; such as the ‘club virtual de libros de editoriales independientes’ (Blanc, 2013) and the increasingly inclusive ‘Feria del Libro Independiente y Autogestiva’ (Vanoli, 2010: 136). In this context, plenty of authors who would not have been published by the already established ‘editoriales pequeñas nacionales’ (Szpilbarg, 2010: 2) - such as Entropía, Interzona or Blatt & Ríos- gained new opportunities to get their voices heard and their texts read. Within this frame, the previously unknown

⁶¹ Whilst ‘el kirchnerismo’ (Della Rocca, 2013: 101) saw ‘la reforma’ (Binder, 2008: 49) as ‘parte de la democratización interna del Poder Judicial’ (Binder, 2008: 49), the opposition made ‘fuertes críticas’ (Binder, 2008: 49) of the project. Concerning the contradictory versions of the real economic growth and inflation indexes, the opposition reiteratively denounced that the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INDEC) ‘started reporting official [inflation] statistics that were systematically below the unofficial estimates’ (Cavallo, Cruces, Perez-Truglia, 2016: 3). In terms of the new personalities incorporated into the political scenario, whilst ‘el kirchnerismo’ (Della Rocca, 2013: 101) considered the performance of the fledging economist Axel Kiciloff ‘an exemplary act’ (Brandt, Erixon, 2013: 6), he ‘inicialmente fue demonizado como supuesto ‘marxista’ por los medios de derecha’ (Castilla, Castillo, 2015: 140).

author Mauro Moschini was able to edit his book *Tarde de amigas*; published by Moschini himself with El Brazo Editora.⁶²

Although the book was not widely disseminated, a set of critics have expressed their opinions on the short stories compiled in the publication, mainly approaching Moschini's way of 'manejar el lenguaje' (Gherghorovich, 2015). In this sense, reviewers have emphasised that 'Moschini escribe desde su definición de literatura, y su literatura personal está teñida por la oralidad, el ritmo. Lo que llaman música; lo que va a inundar a todos los cuentos' (Guerrero, 2016). In spite of the fact that none of the articles have carried out an in-depth analysis on the gender and sexual identities of the characters, some reviews have pointed out that these were key issues that needed further investigation; particularly in relation to the homonymous story 'Tarde de amigas'.⁶³ Within this particular story, which focuses on the bond between two female characters, stereotypical features of young feminine women belonging to 'la juventud universitaria de clase media urbana porteña' (Moschini, 2016) are explored.⁶⁴ These are women who, despite not being explicitly labeled as such, have been identified by most readers as 'minitas' (Del Castillo, 2016: 1). As the *minitas* are thought to be predominantly feminine, this analysis will specifically study which stereotypically feminine features are attributed to the characters. Due to the fact that some stereotypical masculine features are also attached to the female characters in the story, this analysis will explore how these features affect the alleged feminine identities of the protagonists. Subsequently, this analysis will study if the gendered identities of the characters are constructed out of a sum

⁶² It is worth noticing that, by this time, the previously unknown and rising figure of Mariano Blatt was in charge of Blatt & Ríos, a recognized independent publisher that 'makes for good ... reading for those interested in the latest in Buenos Aires culture' (Croft, 2010: 143).

⁶³ Following Florencia Del Castillo, the story depicts 'un contexto heterosexual, universitario, intelectual de ¿clase media? ... con cierta consciencia de clase. Dentro de este universo, podemos reconocer marcas. Pero la identidad de género es abordada con una complejidad mayor' (Del Castillo, 2016: 1). From Nicolás Guerrero's complementary perspective, the centrality of the sex/gendered identities of the characters in Moschini's text is based on the fact that 'en el cuento *Tarde de amigas*, se retrata la relación sexual de dos chicas que luego se citan a la noche con dos chicos, pero sin darse definiciones definitivas de una búsqueda de identidad de género de ningún tipo; partiendo desde la construcción de personajes y situación inicial, puede parecer al principio un estereotipo de cuento erótico amateur, pero la artesanía del autor se encuentra en las contradicciones que se van agregando' (Guerrero, 2016). Although Guerrero is aware of these contradictions and Del Castillo emphasises that the story addresses the characters' identities with great complexity, they both confine themselves to saying that the nature of the gender and the sexual identities of the characters needs to be explored further.

⁶⁴ This quotation, as well as the following quotations attributed to Mauro Moschini, belongs to an interview to be broadcasted during October's edition of the radio show *Las Lecturas*, Radio Gráfica FM 89.3, Buenos Aires.

of stereotypically masculine and feminine features, or if the text opens up a path to look at sex/gendered identities from an increasingly complex perspective. Finally, an analysis of these topics will lead to an understanding of how and to what extent the meaning of *minita* has been redefined and/or appropriated by the story.⁶⁵

As outlined in the previous paragraph, there is a series of feminine features attributed to the main characters. The first, and most extensive part of the text, contains a conversation between the narrator and ‘Florecia’ (Moschini, 2013: 10) in which Florecia speaks so much and so fast that the dialogue becomes almost a monologue, which includes only a few replies from the narrator. According to Abby Kaplan’s study, it is believed that ‘women speak more ... and are inherently more indirect’ (Kaplan, 2016: 155) than men, which makes fast and unnecessary expressiveness a stereotypical marker of femininity.⁶⁶ Another feature of stereotypical femininity which is shown within this first scene is the fact that Florecia describes her former partner Gonzalo by stating that he was a ‘tipo’ (Moschini, 2013: 10) who ‘tenía auto’ (Moschini, 2013: 10), ‘ganaba bien’ (Moschini, 2013: 10), ‘[la] llevaba a los bosques de Palermo o ... Puerto Madero’ (Moschini, 2013: 10), used to buy her ‘Chandon’ (Moschini, 2013: 10) and got her a new mobile phone ‘bastante bueno’ (Moschini, 2013: 10).⁶⁷ According to recent research published by Peter Toddt, Lars Penke, Barbara Fasolo and Alison Lenton, stereotypically feminine women measure men’s value ‘according to their wealth and status’ (Toddt, Penke, Fasolo, Lenton, 2012: 3) and are attracted to ‘money and other resources’ (Toddt, Penke, Fasolo, Lenton, 2012: 3). In this sense, the fact that Florecia explicitly values her former partner’s purchasing power and his tendency to control the situations –it is stated he was the one that ‘[la] llevaba’ or ‘[le] compraba’– appears as an indicator of stereotypical femininity. Another indicator of

⁶⁵ In Florecia Del Castillo’s words, ‘en todo caso, vale cuestionarse, por sobre todo: si hay rasgos de minita, ¿qué es lo minita? ¿qué lugar ocupa dentro de "lo femenino" o "lo mujer"? ¿existe un "anti-minita"? ¿Cómo explicar los vínculos entre las posiciones que uno elige (¿elige?) ocupar y su deseo o preferencia sexual?’ (Del Castillo, 2016: 1).

⁶⁶ As has been pointed out in the analysis of Mariano Blatt’s *Incredible*, Kaplan mentions the belief that women speak more than men so she can demonstrate that this idea ‘is clearly a myth’ (Kaplan, 2016: 175).

⁶⁷ In this context, the meaning of ‘tipo’ simply functions as a slang word for ‘guy’. In regards to the places to which the former boyfriend took her out, both Palermo and Puerto Madero are identified as wealthy areas in Buenos Aires. Concerning the couple’s drinking habits or preferences, ‘Chandon’ is a recognized brand of ‘prestige champagne’ (Santala, 2016: 31) or ‘quality champagne’ (Santala, 2016: 31).

stereotypical femininity can be found in the way in which Florencia describes Gonzalo's physical appearance, as she states that 'era un morocho ... divino' (Moschini, 2015: 9); according to E. D. Lawson, this coincides with the predominant 'cultural ideal of ... the tall, dark, handsome male' (Lawson, 1971: 312). At the same time, Florencia highlights the fact that Gonzalo has 'los abdominales marcaditos' (Moschini, 2013: 10); as Ida Jodette Hatoum and Deborah Belle point out, stereotypical women are often characterized as being attracted to 'the hypermuscular male body' (Belle, Hatoum, 2014: 397). In this sense, both features which Florencia describes as part of Gonzalo's physical features coincide with the stereotypical feminine ideal of an attractive man. Another stereotypically feminine trait which is associated with Florencia is the fact that she enjoys that Gonzalo '[la] malcría' (Moschini, 2013: 11); at the same time, this tendency is related with a stereotypical aspect of contemporary feminine women which is exhibited when Florencia angrily states: '[Gonzalo] estaba muerto con conmigo' (Moschini, 2013: 11) and 'me estaba mucho encima' (Moschini, 2013: 11). Bearing the previous statements in mind, it can be proposed that as much as a stereotypical contemporary woman wants 'to be pampered and pleased' (Lazar, 2009: 372), she does not fall in love with men that give her too much attention. In this case, the fact that Florencia retrospectively sees Gonzalo as 'un tipo' (Moschini, 2013:13) among others, shows that she enjoys being taken care of but finds excessive caring romantically unappealing.⁶⁸

In spite of Florencia bearing many stereotypical feminine features, some stereotypical aspects can be also found in the narrator's attitudes. For instance, when Florencia wants to change the plan that she has made with the narrator so as to spend time with Gonzalo -who she has recently met 'en el patio de la facultad' (Moschini, 2013: 11)- the narrator gets angry and proceeds to show that anger in a rather infantile way. Specifically, when Florencia 'se quiere sentar [después de] ir a buscar miel' (Moschini, 2013: 13), the narrator occupies Florencia's chair with her feet and 'no los mueve' (Moschini, 2013: 13). As Julie Winterich points out, certain stereotypical women intend to preserve not only

⁶⁸ As Michelle M. Lazar suggests, this combination between wanting to be pampered without wanting to be over-spoiled might be related to the fact that contemporary feminine women seek to preserve 'independence and confidence while at the same time reaffirming unambiguously women's gendered identity' (Lazar, 2009: 381).

their ‘younger outside selves’ (Winterich, 2007: 52) but also ‘their younger ‘inside selves’; thus embodying childish and/or adolescent attitudes such as the one acted out by the narrator. As Pavica Sheldon also suggests, this behaviour is developed in young women as a response to a cultural standard according to which girls who are immature or unintelligent are likely to ‘achieve the cultural ideals of attractiveness’ (Sheldon, 2010: 277).⁶⁹ This stereotypically feminine attitude can be linked with two other typical feminine features: jealousy and ‘el histeriqueo’ (Conde, 2011: 45). As defined by Oscar Conde, ‘histeriquear significa seducir, pero evitando el contacto’ (Conde, 2011: 45) and ‘coincide con ... el *acting* público, la necesidad de ser mirado, de destacarse, de constituirse en el centro de atención’ (Conde, 2011: 45). In the case of the narrator’s attitude, it is evident that the game of not letting Florencia sit is designed to attract her attention whilst appearing childishly angry that Florencia wanted to change their plans.⁷⁰ Moreover, the narrator’s anger can be seen as a symptom of jealousy, as Florencia places a night with a tipo over a ‘noche de amigas’ (Moschini, 2013: 15). As Andaç Demirtas and Ali Donmez point out, it is often thought that there is ‘a positive relationship between femininity and jealousy’ (Demirtas, Donmez, 2006:2); in other words, jealousy is an emotion often associated with womanhood. Altogether, the three attitudes described above -infantilism, jealousy and ‘el histeriqueo’ (Conde, 2011: 55)- can be linked with the prejudice according to which women are more emotional, even ‘irrational, helpless ... mentally distressed’ (Fallah, Meyer, Wood, 2011: 219) and ‘associated with «the heart» ... rather than «the head» and rationality’ (Woodward, 1997: 37).

Even though these feminine features attached to the characters are present in the story, there is also a series of stereotypically masculine aspects which are also attributed to them. Firstly, Florencia describes Gonzalo as ‘la estatua de un chongo’ (Moschini, 2013: 9). Within this scenario, a *chongo* is

⁶⁹ It is relevant to note that, although the narrator employs this strategy to have an impact on Florencia, it is a stratagem identified with stereotypical ‘women’s responses in line with normative femininity’ (Winterich, 2007: 51) which has been historically devoted to fulfil male standards.

⁷⁰ As ‘el histeriqueo’ (Conde, 2011: 55) is a neologism that stems from ‘la histeria’ (Conde, 2011:56), and insofar as ‘el carácter histérico’ (Conde, 2011: 56) has been prevalently considered ‘exclusivo del cuerpo femenino’ (Conde, 2011: 56); ‘el histeriqueo’ (Conde, 2011: 55) has been historically considered a stereotypical feminine feature. However, as has been mentioned in the previous chapter of this dissertation, it has been proved that ‘hysteria [is] not an exclusively female disease’ (Tasca, Rapetti, Giovanni Carta, Fadda, 2012: 74).

identified as a man with whom a woman is sexually rather than romantically involved.⁷¹ In this sense, Florencia sees Gonzalo's personality as mostly unattractive as she explicitly states: 'no le daba mucho la cabeza' (Moschini, 2013: 11), yet she also says that Gonzalo 'fue el primer tipo que ... garchó bien ... el primero con el que disfrut[ó] de verdad el sexo' (Moschini, 2013: 11).⁷² According to Mulder and Schacht's point of view, there is a myth according to which 'men want casual sex, while women want relationships' (Mulder, Schacht, 2015: 140). As much feminist work on women's sexual desires have also found, society sees desire for casual sex as stereotypically masculine; therefore, the fact that here Florencia is the one who wants casual sex shows that she is engaging in allegedly masculine behaviour rather than in a supposedly feminine way. At the same time, the physical aspects that Florencia finds attractive in Gonzalo -although stereotypically feminine- are described in such a manner that Gonzalo appears as a sum of features which make him an object of sexual desire. As Dawn Szymanski, Lauren Moffit and Erika Carr point out, 'sexual objectification' (Szymanski, Moffit, Carr, 2011: 6) is a practice prevalently carried out by men 'in a sociocultural context that mainly objectifies the female body' (Szymanski, Moffit, Carr, 2011: 6); in this sense, the fact that Florencia objectifies Gonzalo can be identified as a reversal of these gendered stereotypes. This feature can be also spotted in the narrator's behaviour as, when she sees Gonzalo after accepting Florencia's new plan which implies that the narrator has to simulate being interested in Gonzalo's friend, the narrator states that Gonzalo 'es pancho pero lindo' (Moschini, 2013: 21).⁷³ This description, in the same way as Florencia's, suggests that the narrator is also giving prevalence to the tipo's physical appearance over his personality. Another stereotypically masculine feature enacted by the narrator is one that can be found in the initial conversation between the two main characters; in this context, the fact that the dialogue becomes almost a monologue by Florencia supposes that the narrator must have been silent during most of the interaction. In other words, the display

⁷¹ It is worth noticing that, although the *chongo* is here defined as a man with whom a woman is sexually involved, that involvement does not imply prostitution as it did in Vanoli's work.

⁷² The word 'garchar' is an Argentinean slang term for 'having sex' which is commonly employed to refer to casual rather than romantic interactions. Thus, the fact that this word is used in this sentence supports the idea of Florencia being sexually attracted but not romantically involved with Gonzalo.

⁷³ In this context, the word 'pancho' means 'dumb'; which suggests that, as Florencia, the narrator praises Gonzalo's sexual appeal while dismissing his intellectual side and/or his potential as a romantic partner.

of the stereotypically feminine marker according to which Florencia ‘talks too much’ (Holmes, 1998: 42) depends on the fact that the narrator talks too little. According to Janet Holmes, this mostly unexpressive attitude enacted by the narrator coincides with a belief according to which ‘while women talk more than men and ... men are silent patient listeners’ (Holmes, 1998: 43).⁷⁴ Finally, a gesture that might link the narrator’s gender with a male identity –a gesture that, from a chronological perspective, comes first– involves the fact that there is no grammatically gendered adjective or pronoun until the third page of the text. According to Monika Fludernik’s study, ‘the idea seems to be that natural authors have determinable sex’ (Fludernik, 1996: 269) and their default sexuality is generally superimposed to ‘their first-person narrators’ (Fludernik, 1996: 269). If normally the reader approaches the text with the default assumption according to which each narrator of an author recognizable as man is a man as well, then the reader of Moschini’s story is already predisposed to attribute a male gendered identity to the narrator. The production of this belief according to which a female narrator is initially thought to be a man, appears to evoke the strategy already deployed by Fogwill in ‘La larga risa de todos esos años’. Although Moschini initially states: ‘Ni pensé en generar el intertexto con Fogwill cuando escribí el cuento’ (Moschini, 2016), he recalls that ‘había leído ‘La larga risa de todos esos años’ varias veces antes de escribir la historia’ (Moschini, 2016). Lastly, he concludes: ‘Cuando volví a leer mi cuento después de escribirlo, me di cuenta de que muchos diálogos estaban hechos casi de la misma manera que los del texto de Fogwill’ (Moschini, 2016). Although it can be inferred that there is an indirect or implicit intertext between the two stories, there are also two specific differences: firstly, while Fogwill’s story initially keeps the narrator’s sexuality hidden by simply not contradicting the reader’s initial presupposition, Moschini’s text explicitly presents the narrator as mostly silent which, as it is considered a marker of masculinity, provides the reader with an additional reason for believing that the narrator is a man. Secondly, while Fogwill keeps the narrator’s sexuality hidden until the end of the text because it is central to the plot’s deployment and intrigue, Moschini uses this strategy as an element of surprise that is not sustained as the story is not

⁷⁴ It is worth noticing that Holmes identifies this idea as being a stigma and a prejudice. Thus, she accepts that talking too much is just a stereotypical feature commonly attached to femininity, while being silent is a feature typically identified with masculinity.

focused on that reader's first prejudice, but rather on the particularity of the relationship developed between the two main characters. However, an initial hypothesis according to which these characters' identities can be reduced to the sum of stereotypically masculine and the stereotypically feminine features pointed out above becomes unlikely when other factors are incorporated into the analysis. The most prevalent of those factors is the nature of the homosocial bond between the two main characters.

From the beginning of the story, the narrator has an erotic attraction towards Florencia. This attraction can be first grasped when the narrator states: '[Florencia] apoya la espalda en la silla, se estira como una gata. Un bretel de su remerita blanca se le cae del hombro' (Moschini, 2013: 12). In this statement, the word 'gata' works as a metaphor that describes the way in which the narrator stretches, but it also functions as a sexually charged term which presupposes the 'erotic appeal ... of the feline' (Rogers, 2001: 185). The description also includes an erotic portrayal of 'el bretel de la remerita ca[yendo]' (Moschini, 2013: 12), which operates as a metonymy of Florencia undressing or being undressed. In a word, by seeing the shirt 'cayendo', the narrator can imagine the same action happening with the rest of Florencia's clothes.

However, the attraction that the narrator shows is not only erotic, but presumably also romantic. During the long dialogue which constitutes the story's first scene, the unexpressive attitude of the narrator, which I have argued is a stereotypically masculine feature, can be also identified with the fact that the narrator does not enjoy the fact that Florencia is still somehow interested in Gonzalo, which is evident as most of the dialogue revolves around him and ends up with the plan of foregoing 'una noche de amigas' (Moschini, 2013: 15) for a night with Gonzalo and a friend of his. Apart from being expressed by a mostly silent attitude, the fact that the narrator is annoyed by Florencia's attraction towards Gonzalo can be also grasped in the lack of enthusiasm shown by the narrator's replies. For instance, when Florencia states: 'ahora [Gonzalo] se hace el *indie* ... está bueno que haya cambiado aunque sea un poco, ¿no?' (Moschini, 2013: 12), the narrator 'le dic[e] sin ganas que sí' (Moschini, 2013: 12). This absence of empathy is also shown when the narrator explicitly admits:

‘[Floencia] sabe que no me gusta que le guste [Gonzalo]’ (Moschini, 2013: 13). In this context, the jealousy that has been previously attributed to the irrational stereotype of the feminine woman can be reevaluated and explained by the fact that the narrator is both erotically and romantically attracted to Floencia.

Although it may seem that the narrator’s attraction is not reciprocated, as Floencia is explicitly attracted to Gonzalo; such reflection presupposes that both desires are mutually exclusive. According to Judith Butler’s standpoint, the hegemonic ‘heterosexual matrix’ (Butler, 1990: 45) requires heterosexuality to remain stable for its preservation and also ‘demands the notion of homosexuality’ (Butler, 1990: 45) as heterosexuality’s unequal counterpart. In this context, a woman is pushed both to be attracted to men and not to be attracted to other women so that her gender and her sexual identities are divided by two mutually exclusive options. Although this dichotomous structure can explain an initial supposition according to which Floencia’s attraction towards Gonzalo implies her lack of attraction towards the narrator, this presumption is not only incorrect as it defines homosexuality and heterosexuality as mutually exclusive, but it is also false in the context of Moschini’s text. Within the story, the scene that follows the long dialogue between the two main characters shows Floencia explicitly inviting the narrator to share the bed with her. Immediately after, the narrator states: ‘¡[Floencia] Me da un beso! ... Beso. Beso. Calor. Rica Saliva ... la pasamos muy bien’ (Moschini, 2013: 18); although the sexual interaction is elided, the next scene shows Floencia putting back on her clothes. A similar elision occurs when the narrator states that Floencia is taking a bath but then describes the temperature of the water: ‘Ella se baña con agua muy caliente ... Me quema un poco’ (Moschini, 2013: 18). Just as the scene of Floencia putting back on her clothes implies the sexual interaction between her and the narrator, the narrator’s knowledge of the water’s temperature and the use of the pronoun ‘me’ also suggest that the characters are bathing together.

Even though this sexual interaction evidences that there is a reciprocal erotic desire, it does not prove that the romantic attraction is also reciprocal. During the interaction, the narrator expresses her romantic feelings not only by mentally repeating: ‘Me enamoro’ (Moschini, 2013: 17), but also by letting her thoughts out and explicitly communicating them to Floencia. In this sense,

there is a first instance in which the thought is formed and a subsequent moment in which that thought is communicated; as can be grasped in the extract: 'Beso. Beso. Te amo hermosa. -Te amo, hermosa -le digo' (Moschini, 2013: 17). As soon as these feelings arise, they are immediately counteracted by Florencia who insists: 'No te enamores, pelotuda' (Moschini, 2013: 17), 'No te enamores ... somos amigas ... te quiero como amiga' (Moschini, 2013: 18). Although the narrator diminishes the impact of her romantic confession by replying: 'No me enamoro, idiota ... te quiero como amiga, como me voy a enamorar' (Moschini, 2013: 18), that kind of reply sounds unrealistic in the context of the narrator's behaviours and feelings that have been described in the previous paragraphs. During the scene in which the quoted dialogue is framed, the exchange between the characters continues as a constant oscillation between what is being stated and what is being expressed by their bodies.

At this point, this exchange can be understood through the lens of two different standpoints. According to the first one, the sexual contact is part of a scene in which two same-sex lovers interact in conformity with the standards of a stereotypical masculine fantasy.⁷⁵ From this perspective, while the behaviour of the narrator can be understood as homosexual, which, although outside the norm, preserves its dichotomous structure; Florencia's behaviour can be interpreted as a return to the default status of heterosexuality as proved by the fact that she does not allow the interaction to go any further. This could also be sustained by the fact that in the end, Florencia decides to continue with her plan to see Gonzalo instead of opting to keep her original plans with the narrator. From this perspective, the final scene which shows the narrator preparing 'un té de manzanilla' (Moschini, 2013: 24) for herself could be interpreted as proof of the narrator being a rather shameful character who is destined to end up companionless. This kind of conclusion would imply that the text's standpoint coincides with a normative perspective which, as Butler has already posed, establishes a dichotomous structure that is built of the valuation of heterosexuality and the devaluation of homosexuality. In a complementary

⁷⁵ As has been posed in the previous chapter, the standards of a stereotypical masculine fantasy are the ones of 'the sexploitation model of lesbian-themed films' (Williams, 2004: 169). This model, which depicts erotic interaction between women as a naïve simulation and not as an embracement of a homosexual identity between the same-sex lovers, intends to draw a clear and steady line between the playful homosocial bond and the homosexual bond.

manner, Florencia's attitude could be seen as a successful attempt at drawing a clear line between 'the homosocial [the friendship; the playful contact] and the homosexual' (Segdwick, 1985: 696).

According to the second and qualitatively different standpoint, facts are not that conclusive and conclusions are not that clear. Firstly, while the previous perspective identifies what is being expressed bodily as a univocal sign of playful eroticism and what is being said as a literal expression of a fixed truth, this is not supported by the story. Although the reader knows both the thoughts and the statements of the narrator, s/he does not know what Florencia's inner thoughts are. If, as has been previously shown by the narrator's communication of her reflections, there is an instance in which the thought is built and an instance in which that thought is communicated, it is completely possible for Florencia to state something that contradicts what she feels. Moreover, as these verbal statements are intertwined with bodily interactions, Florencia's inner emotions can be reasonably intertwined or expressed within the sexual contact while remaining contradicted by her verbal stances.⁷⁶ Therefore, the supposition according to which the meaning of the bodily contact can be clearly separated from the meaning of the verbal statements is not consistent. At the same time, the hypothesis posed by the first viewpoint supposes that the sexual identity of the characters is both unequivocal and stable, which the story contradicts. After having sex with Florencia and expressing that she loves her, the narrator states that Gonzalo 'es ...lindo' (Moschini, 2013: 21), which suggests that the narrator is not homosexual but bisexual. Moreover, this attitude points to the fact that her sexuality cannot be determined by one of two poles; as Moschini states: 'según el texto, no se puede decir que ninguna se defina ni como heterosexual ni como lesbiana. A lo sumo, las dos son bisexuales por lo que hacen, pero no se puede saber si se considerarían a sí mismas así, porque no están designadas de ninguna manera definida. Lo único que las define son sus acciones y el cuento es sólo una tarde' (Moschini, 2016).

⁷⁶ As has been shown in the analysis of *Incredible*, there is no exact correlation between bodily and verbal signs of erotic attraction. In the case of Blatt's text, the character El Pibe de Oro enacts this kind of ambivalence between what is being said and what is being acted; inasmuch as, although El Pibe de Oro explicitly states that he is not attracted to the narrator, his body language and behaviours indicate otherwise.

This perspective, along with what happens in the story, opens up a new horizon that has relevant implications. Firstly, it calls into question the idea that gender and sexual identities are placed within one or the other pole of a dichotomous structure; on the contrary, it agrees with Sedgwick's perspective according to which these identities are part of a continuum in which the line between the homosocial and the homosexual is always and constitutively 'blurry' (Sedgwick, 1985: 696). Moreover, this perspective states that a subject's identity cannot be identified at some point of a dichotomy nor at some point of a continuum because that identity does not remain always the same across time. As Moschini states: 'El cuento es sólo una tarde' (Moschini, 2016); consequently, it is not through the story that the sexual and the gender identities of the characters can be defined, insofar as the story is only one temporal instance that does not represent the previous or prospective fluctuations in the characters' desires and behaviours. Within the story, the possibility of fluctuations in the characters' identities are not only supported by the fact that the narrator oscillates between being attracted to Florencia and finding Gonzalo attractive a few hours later nor by the fact that Florencia's bodily expressions might contradict her verbal statements, but also by the text's ending. At the end, the scene that describes the narrator going to bed by herself is not portrayed as a pathetic image, inasmuch as the state of being alone is not identified with the sentiment of feeling lonely; as an autonomous individual that can both enjoy the company of others and a moment of solitude, the narrator ends up singing: '*Hoy el viento ... lo vi libre y me enamoré*' (Moschini, 2015: 24). In this verse, the word 'hoy' emphasises the fact that love is something that can both arise in and last for a day. This is also sustained by the fact that the final phrase of the story states: 'Al fin llego a la cama ... No tengo que poner el despertador, porque mañana es domingo' (Moschini, 2015: 24). Through this phrase, it is clear that the day has ended neither with a grandiloquent conclusion nor with a deep-seated feeling of deception about the fact that Florencia has ended up spending the night with Gonzalo, but with the idea that 'mañana será otro día' (González Orama, 2008); that is to say, what is felt and thought within a day can change the morning after.⁷⁷

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Although here the expression 'mañana será otro día' is extracted from the homonymous song of the

The previous reflections lead to a set of conclusions. For a start, within the story sexual and gender identities are neither predetermined nor steady as the complexity of feelings and thoughts which build those identities are also fluctuating. This last reflection coincides with Nicolás Bermudez's argument, according to which thoughts and feelings are not only changeable but intertwined, as 'las emociones' (Bermudez, 2014: 13) can be studied from the perspective of '[su] construcción cultural, los rituales que las organizan, el vocabulario que las nombra y los movimientos corporales que las expresan' (Bermudez, 2014: 15). This perspective can be also strengthened by Judith Butler's theoretical position, which states that the 'contingent cultural constitution' (Butler, 1990: 153) of sentimental, rational and self-configurations makes them inherently changeable and unstable. In this sense, if the term *minita* is presupposed, appropriated and attributed to Moschini's characters -as critics such as Florencia Del Castillo have suggested- this might be done at the beginning of the text only to prove that the meaning of *minita* is not only structurally changeable but actually modified in the course of the story. During the story, the sexual and gendered identities attributed to the *minitas* -who are supposed to be prevalently heterosexual and feminine- are not supported by the characters' actual behaviour, which cannot possibly fulfil the rigid standards of neither the womanhood nor the femininity expected from them.

All things considered, Moschini's story disobeys gendered and sexual normativities by opening up a whole new spectrum of possibilities in which not only the heteronormative dichotomous structure is dissolved, but so too is the imperative to remain at one point of either a dichotomy or a continuum. In this context, fluctuating identities and changes in characters are not only constitutive, but are also more than welcome.

Venezuelan artist Tyrone José González Oramas (also known as Canserbero), it is also a common proverb frequently and colloquially used in Argentina.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Throughout the previous chapters, I have analyzed the extent to which five Argentinean fictions resist and/or obey normative constructions of gendered identities. In order to do so, this analysis has begun with the contextualization of each story in terms of the political, economic, social, cultural and editorial scenarios in which that story was written and/or set; taking into special consideration the relationship between each scenario and the sex/gender normativities that emerged from it. Once a given story was framed in its correspondent context, I established the relationships between the sex/gendered identities of the story's characters and the stereotypical masculine and feminine features attributed to them. This analysis has also focused on each story's appropriation, questioning and/or reformulation of the meaning of specific linguistic terms historically associated with the stereotypes of femininity/masculinity. Correlatively, the story's perspective on these stereotypes as linked with the heteronormative dichotomous structure on which they rely has been studied. Finally, every chapter of this dissertation has approached the resistance or obedience towards this dichotomous structure as measured by each story's critical (or uncritical) position in relation to it and by the possibilities that each story opens up to think of sex/gendered identities placed outside the heteronormative matrix.

This trajectory, however, creates two apparent paradoxes that need to be addressed before any conclusions can be drawn. The first apparent contradiction is that of the historical nature of the gendered normativities and the transhistorical nature of the heteronormative matrix on which they rely.⁷⁸ As the previous chapters show, this analysis has placed particular emphasis on the historical contextualization of particular notions of gender and on the specific sex/gendered identities that were condemned and/or unpublishable during specific time periods. These fluctuations in the very concept of gender have been pertinent when contrasting a specific story with the models characteristic

⁷⁸ The fact that this matrix is transhistorical does not mean that it is ahistorical, but that it has been prevalent across different time periods.

of its time, and need to be taken into account when comparing one story with the other. However, it is worth highlighting that none of the transformations to the normativities of gender has successfully demolished the heteronormative matrix that regulates the same prevalent sex/gender dichotomous structure.⁷⁹ This reflection is relevant inasmuch as it explains why the stories' perspectives have been studied in relation to different notions of gendered normativities but, at the same time, in relation to an equal, transhistorical matrix on which all the prevalent constructions of gendered normativities have relied to date.

The second apparent contradiction that needs to be addressed is that of the nonlinear trajectory of the literary scene in terms of its progressiveness toward new forms of gendered identities and the dependency of new notions of gendered identities on the stories' time of publication. In other words, although a given contemporary story might be more obedient towards gendered normativities than a story that was published forty years ago, today the limits placed around what is publishable or even thinkable in terms of how gendered identities ought to be understood are flexible and constantly expanding. However, as has been briefly suggested in the introduction, the fact that new ways of thinking and expressing gendered normativities have become available in the increasingly open-minded Argentinean society does not guarantee that contemporary writers are going to make use of these possibilities in their texts. Thus, it seems pertinent to analyse a given story paying attention to the limits that its time of publication sets in terms of publishable and/or thinkable notions of gendered normativities; but it is also important to note that not all available forms of sex/gendered identities are going to be taken into account by all contemporary writers.

According to this thesis, Vanoli's story ought to be considered the most obedient towards pre-fixed notions of gendered normativities and their

⁷⁹ To give just one example, the passage from the condemnation of homosexuality during the dictatorship period to the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2010, covers different sex/gendered normativities that were nonetheless implemented within the same binary system. In other words, the legalization of same-sex marriage is still based on the pairing man/woman and does not necessarily oppose the dichotomy masculinity/femininity. However, it is worth mentioning that –as has been suggested in the previous chapters and as will be pointed out below–, the cultural path towards increasing broad-mindedness has opened up new ways of apprehending sex/gendered identities that were unthinkable forty years ago.

foundations. Firstly, as the characters in *Las mellizas del bardo* are constructed out of a sum of stereotypical features that can be clearly associated with either femininity or masculinity, no alternative to these stereotypes is drawn. Although highlighting stereotypical characteristics might be understood as a way of critically underlining their stereotypicality -that is, their cultural nature-; the fact that the characters' identities are built upon no more than these two clearly discerned stereotypes does not provide an alternative for their disobedience. Secondly, Vanoli's futuristic world, where women are *barrabravas* and men are mostly servants, seeks to invert the social roles and the relation of dominance between stereotypical women and men; but does not question the very logic of this system which is based on both dominance and a sex/gendered dichotomous structure. Thirdly, *Las mellizas del bardo's* standpoint relies not only on a sex/gendered binary structure, but on the prevalent heteronormative one; inasmuch as women are depicted as ultimately heterosexual and dependent on men. In this context, and as has been argued, the text alters the meaning of the term *mina* but only relatively and in a mostly negative manner.

Although Fogwill's text shares some similarities with Vanoli's, its overall attitude towards gender norms is ostensibly more critical. As happens with Vanoli's text, Fogwill emphasises the stereotypical features that define his characters, which can be interpreted as a way to critically highlight the cultural nature of those features. This hypothesis is backed up by the fact that the text uses those stereotypes to make the reader assume that the narrator is a man, only to be surprised by the fact that the narrator is a woman.⁸⁰ The fact that the narrator is a woman also explains why the use of stereotypes is much more disobedient in the case of Fogwill's story than in the case of Vanoli's text. Not only does Fogwill make his readers realize that their notions of gendered identities are based on a sum of stereotypical features, but he also makes them confront the fact that they usually expect a couple to be heterosexual rather than homosexual. Besides making the readers' prejudices visible, Fogwill's story disobeys the normativities of its own time of publication by making visible a sexual identity that was condemned during that period. However, as the

⁸⁰ Although Fogwill's story does not question nor reformulate the meaning of a specific linguistic term as all the other stories do, the use of certain linguistic expressions and the exclusion of others play a central role in his story. As the intrigue is based on the unrevealed sex/gendered identity of the narrator, a special use of ungendered pronouns and adjectives is crucial for the deployment of the story.

characters are involved in a butch/femme relation which only allows for binary combinations in the assumption of sex/gendered identities, the story does not disobey the dichotomous structure on which those sex/gendered normativities depend.

The possibility of disobeying such structures is addressed to some degree by Uhart's story. From the perspective of *Señorita*, what needs to be underlined is not only the culturally constructed nature of the stereotype, but also the impossibility of fulfilment of any stereotype as such. Through the construction of characters whose personalities are ambivalent, malleable and complex -or in other words, impossible to reduce in terms of two discernible stereotypes-, Uhart manages to criticize the attainability of the ideals of womanhood and manhood that lie behind the stereotypical habits through which those ideals are supposed to be enacted. By doing so, Uhart's story highlights the fact that the very term *señorita* -as well as any other term- is constitutively and concretely subject to change; and that there is no total identification between the ideal meaning of such a term and the individuals to whom it refers. Although this emphasis on the constructed nature of the sex/gendered stereotypes and on the impossibility of their fulfilment represents a step towards a comprehensive critique of the heteronormative dichotomous structure, it still falls short as Uhart's story does not open up any alternative form that could replace the prevalent binary system. Thus, *Señorita* is still tied to that system's restrictions.⁸¹

Those restrictions are defied by Blatt's *Increíble*. Firstly, *Increíble* shares with all the previous texts the attitude towards highlighting the constructed nature of sex/gendered identities. As was the case in Fogwill's text, *Increíble* makes visible a form of sexuality that is considered abject within the heteronormative matrix. However, it is not through the narrator's homosexuality that Blatt's text mostly challenges the heteronormative structure, but through the ambivalent personality of El Pibe de Oro. As with Uhart's characters, El Pibe

⁸¹ It could be even argued that *Señorita* is somehow more conservative than 'La larga risa de todos esos años', inasmuch as the latter makes visible a form of sexual interaction that is considered abject by the prevalent heteronormative system. Instead, *Señorita* depicts several female characters, none of whom is said to be sexually attracted to other women. However, the fact that *Señorita* is set thirty years before Fogwill's story makes it realistic for Uhart's characters not to speak about their putative homoerotic desires.

de Oro is complex and shifting; and his ambivalence expresses the impossibility of constantly identifying with and/or fulfilling any ideal of gender as such. As Uhart does in relation to the notion of the *señorita*, Blatt's story broadens the meaning of the term *pibe* and releases it from its historically normative constraints. Moreover, Blatt's story moves further towards disobedience, inasmuch as El Pibe de Oro's ambivalent homosocial attitude expresses an alternative way of behaving outside the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy. As El Pibe de Oro cannot be strictly identified by either of these two opposite definitions, his complexity can only be grasped by making use of an alternative theory of sex/gender identities; namely, Sedgwick's theory of identity as a point in an 'entire continuum' (Sedgwick, 1985: 696).

Nevertheless, it is only 'Tarde de amigas' that manages to discuss not only the dominant heteronormative dichotomous structure, but also alternative perspectives such as Sedgwick's theory of the spectrum. As all the other texts, and through the characters' ambivalent attitudes, Moschini underlines the cultural nature of sex/gendered identities and of the stereotypes associated with masculinity and femininity. Just like Fogwill's text, Moschini's story employs linguistic strategies to hide and to surprisingly reveal the narrator's sexuality to the reader, who is faced with the fact that s/he tends to infer the narrator's sex/gendered identity from stereotypical features hinted at in the text. As was the case in Uhart's and Blatt's works, and through the presupposition of the notion of *minita*, Moschini's text also emphasises the impossibility of fulfilling any ideal notion of womanhood/manhood, as well as the possibility of disputing the meaning of a specific term historically constrained by dominant gendered normativities. Finally, like El Pibe de Oro, the sex/gendered identities of Moschini's characters are ambivalent, complex and shifting.

However, there are two qualitative differences that make Moschini's text specifically resistant to gendered norms. Firstly, whereas El Pibe de Oro seems to express ambivalent desires but does not consummate his homoerotic attraction towards the narrator, Moschini's characters consummate their erotic desires towards women and men during the story. This is relevant because it does not allow for the possibility of interpreting homoerotic attraction as a

temporary deviation that is (or might be) ultimately repressed. Secondly, Moschini's characters' attitudes towards their own sex/gendered identities shift within the short interval of an afternoon and they are only depicted during that specific time. As shown in my analysis of the story, the fact that the reader only receives information about that afternoon, along with the fact that the characters' attitudes change from one moment to the other within that very short interval, suggests that the reader cannot fix the sex/gendered identities of the characters.⁸² Moreover, the text suggests that sex/gendered identities cannot be fixed and thus escapes not only the binary structure of the heteronormative matrix, but also rejects the idea that identity is one fixable point in a continuum. Thus, 'Tarde de amigas' opens up an alternative path that is critical to contemporary gender norms, to the transhistorical system on which they rely and to other alternative systems that, although fluid, cannot sufficiently grasp the ambivalent, dynamic and rather elusive structure of the characters' sex/gendered identities.

In this context, the previous recapitulation is particularly significant because it has allowed for a concise comparison between the texts' standpoints towards gendered normativities, but also because it has paved the way for a set of conclusions to be drawn. For a start, the texts have used one or more of the following gestures in order to resist sex/gendered norms: the highlighting of the culturally crafted nature of sex/gendered identities, the visualization of practices that are considered abject or that were condemned during a specific time period, the questioning of prevalent or alternative philosophical notions of sex/gendered identities and/or the creation of new forms of sex/gendered identities that might not preexist the publication of the text in which they appear. As the previous paragraphs have shown, which and how many of these gestures are included in a specific story depend on the story's critical or uncritical position towards gendered normativities and towards the dichotomous system on which they are based.

⁸² According to Butler's definition, sex/gendered identities ought to be understood as 'set[s] of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance' (Butler, 1990: 57). By virtue of this iterative nature, sex/gendered identities are only inferable when a pattern of specific behaviours and/or thoughts belonging to a specific character are described; as there is no pattern that can be inferred from the afternoon which 'Tarde de amigas' covers, it is not possible for the reader to fix the sex/gendered identities of characters in the story.

In the case of Vanoli's story, the only manoeuvre that is made is that of highlighting the culturally constructed nature of gendered identities. Apart from doing that, Fogwill's text makes visible the practice of homosexuality which is considered abject within the dominant heterosexual matrix and was specifically condemned during the time of the story's publication. In the case of Uhart's nouvelle, the naturalization of culturally constructed notions of femininity is questioned, but so is the very prevalent notion of femininity; inasmuch as the attainability of any fixed ideal of sex/gendered identity is proven impossible. In Blatt's story, the prevalent notion of sex/gendered identities as predetermined, unequivocal and idealized entities is once again questioned, but new practices that express alternative ways of comprehending sex/gendered identities are also included. In this frame, El Pibe de Oro's ambivalent attitude towards sex/gendered norms allows for an interpretation of identity as a point in a continuum. Finally, Moschini's text incorporates all the aforementioned features, but it also questions alternative or non-dominant philosophical notions of sex/gendered identities. As the shifting identities of Moschini's characters cannot be grasped as fixable points in a 'continuum' (Sedgwick, 1985: 696) but as rather elusive proclivities that can oscillate from one moment to the other, unprecedented forms of enacting and understanding sex/gendered identities are opened up.

Although each text's singular usage of these gestures is relevant to this particular thesis, the value of those gestures exceeds their employment as analyzed in this dissertation. In this framework, what is relevant is not only the fact that these gestures have been employed by a given text in a specific manner; but the fact that they remain available for every literary work that seeks to resist both sex/gendered normativities and the system on which they depend. In this sense, the significance of identifying gestures of resistance lies in their capacity to be reused and reformulated by other texts. At the same time, the fact that these gestures need to be identified suggests that they can always remain overlooked or undiscovered. This means that in order for these new forms of enacting and apprehending sex/gendered identities to be visible and to spread, there has to be readers attentively trying to find them. As has been shown in the previous chapters, an in-depth analysis of the texts' approach towards sex/gendered normativities has often been overlooked by critics even

when the texts have embraced an emphatic attitude of resistance (or obedience) towards these normativities.

However, Argentina's contemporary situation might lead to different reading approaches in the short-term future. Even though Mauricio Macri's ascent to power has been characterized by regressive political, economic and social measures, the increasing visibility of the independent cultural and editorial fields in the public sphere -along with the increasing broad-mindedness that has been achieved in Argentinean society during the years prior to Macri's ascent- suggest that LGBTBI rights are sought to be kept on the political agenda.⁸³ In addition, the growing attention paid to women's rights as a result of recent anti-femicide campaigns has led to the increasing rejection of historical gender inequalities.⁸⁴ In this context of tension between a conservative Executive Power and a large portion of Argentinean society unwilling to lose its historic cultural conquests, it is feasible that more attention will be given to the way sex/gendered identities are expressed in literature. Whereas the progressive atmosphere of the Kirchnerist era allowed for a more relaxed type of reading exercise, one that could afford focusing on the writer's tone because LGBTBI

⁸³ As Marina Weinberg points out, 'what we are witnessing is the creation of a refounding discourse that the PRO, Macri's party, has named the Happiness Revolution—a strengthening of the individual over the social' (Weinberg, 2016: 13). As Weinberg emphasises, this standpoint ought to be interpreted as one among 'the thousands of faces of neoliberalism' (Weinberg, 2016: 14). In this frame, it is worth noticing that 'most of the new political strategies demonstrate the government's intention to destroy processes of social construction, the promotion of individual actions and discourses over collective ones, and the targeting of social movements as enemies' (Weinberg, 2016: 13). The previous point can be illustrated by the fact that 'since Mauricio Macri assumed the presidency in December 2015, all the strategies aimed at small producers, campesinos, and indigenous communities have been under the threat of being eliminated' (Weinberg, 2016: 13). In regard to LGBTBI rights, Mauricio Macri has told in an interview published by *Página/12* on January 18th, 1997 that homosexuality 'es una enfermedad, no es una persona ciento por ciento sana' (Macri, 1997: 3). During that interview, he added: '¿Qué quiere que le haga? Yo le tengo que decir lo que pienso. ¿Y qué voy a pensar? ¿Que lo que hacen está bárbaro? ¿Usted festejaría que su hijo fuera homosexual? Por favor. El mundo nos ha hecho para que nos juntemos con una mujer. ¿Por qué nos vamos a juntar con un hombre? Está bien que es más cómodo. Se puede ir a jugar al tenis y después se puede ir a... todo con el mismo tipo. ¡Pero, por favor!' (Macri, 1997: 3). However, the fact that Macri ended up supporting 'las uniones de personas del mismo sexo' (Propao, 2010: 63) years after – and against his own political party, 'desde donde se planteó un 'enlace civil' para diferenciarlo del matrimonio heterosexual' (Propato, 2010: 63) –; suggests that Argentinean society's mostly favourable perspective in relation to equal marriage outweighed Macri's personal standpoint.

⁸⁴ As Florencia Laura Rovetto underlines, 'el 10 de mayo de 2015 se inicia en Argentina la campaña gráfica #NiUnaMenos. El detonante fue la noticia sobre el hallazgo del cuerpo sin vida de Chiara Páez, de catorce años. La reacción circuló primero a través de las redes sociales ... y ocupó rápidamente todo el arco mediático' (Rovetto, 2015: 15). This led to a protest that 'aglutinó detrás de una sola consigna a una polifónica multitud conformada por una masa anónima de personas indignadas por el creciente número de feminicidios' (Rovetto, 2015: 18). On June 2016, a year after the protest of 2015, a massive crowd once again 'gathered in front of the Buenos Aires congress and called out «basta» ... to femicide and violence against women' (Bleskachek, 2016: 15).

rights were not at stake, the current possibility of losing the cultural achievements of the past decade might lead to a more gender-conscious kind of reading. This kind of reading would not only involve the analysis of texts where sex/gender norms are explicitly addressed, but it would also consider the extent to which every text presupposes a rather resistant or obedient standpoint towards sex/gendered normativities. In a political context where cultural achievements towards equality are at risk, this kind of reading will be not only more frequent but also necessary to secure the future of Argentinean LGBTBI rights.

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